DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 267 405 CS 209 571

TITLE	Hand in Your Writing.
INSTITUTION	Scottish Curriculum Development Service, Edinburgh.
REPORT NO	ISBN-0-947942-25-4
PUB DATE	85
NOTE	66p.; Prepared by the Committee on Primary Education.
AVAILABLE FROM	Scottish Curriculum Development Service, Moray House College of Education, Holyrood Rd., Edinburgh, Scotland EH8 8AQ (1 pound 15 pence).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Information Analyses (070)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Child Development; *Developmental Stages; Handwriting; Primary Education; *Teaching Methods; Writing Evaluation; *Writing Instruction; Writing Processes; Writing Research; *Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

Intended to encourage teachers to examine their assumptions about teaching writing, this document containing a mixture of theory and practice deals with many aspects of writing. The chapters discuss (1) an examination of children's writing and some questions arising from the examination; (2) reasons for failure to write well, including the home background, the nature of writing, and the school; (3) a model for writing that focuses on report writing, story writing, and record writing; (4) a return to the basics (punctuation and spelling); (5) teaching strategies for beginning writing that include using drawings as a communicative act, teaching handwriting, and setting up a writing area; (6) things to do in writing to create a context for learning; and (7) teacher response to writing, including teaching drafting, editing, and correctness. The document concludes with samples of children's writing and an appendix charting children's developmental stages in different kinds of writing and in various skills. (EL)

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COPE COMMITTEE ON PRIMARY EDUCATION

Feelings of Autumn inside and outside

As the season changes once more,
The wind snatches up the rusty leaves,
and drops them to the ground.
~~In the haze of this colour~~
Its sad
~~To watch the summer die,~~
~~Sat th~~
I kick the dead leaves, ~~and~~
and watch them Skitter across the pave-
ment,
But in my mind, sadnesses ?
I feel a mixture of sadnesses,
The wind dances through the trees
The air is cool.
~~All is quiet Silent,~~ (sound of leaves? of wind?)
The stale, dry smell of Autumn,
lingers,
As if it meant to strike (meaning not entirely clear?)
I pull my collar tighter, ~~around me~~
and hurry ~~on~~
The golden leaves fall around me,
littering my path,
Or dancing in the air,
like butterflies.
Though the Summers gone.

A little more work on this could make it tighter — the ending is excellent.

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Hand in your writing

SCOLA Scottish Committee on Language Arts in the Primary School.

CS209 571

ISBN 0 947942 25 4

First Published 1982

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Reprinted 1984, 1985

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AN INTRODUCTORY WORD

No-one has to tell teachers that the teaching of continuous writing is difficult – and by continuous writing we mean personal recall, stories, reports, observations, instructions, etc. We do not restrict continuous writing to the topics covered by so-called 'creative writing' and we would not include dictation or material copied from books or from the board. Even if children master the conventions of writing and produce work that is formally correct, we may feel that what they are writing about is of limited significance – to them as much as to us. We can verify this if we talk to children about those things that they write about. There is often a remarkable difference between those things that a child chooses to tell us through writing and those things that he volunteers to us when we talk with him about the same event. To many children, writing must be something peculiar to school; something to be done and handed in but not necessarily to become deeply involved in. Children's writing is not always like this; all teachers will think of children whose writing, even if not always correct, is a natural instrument for the expression of their experiences and for the products of their imagination and intellect. Writing is not an activity that is complete in itself: not simply a skill. What is of utmost importance in any language task is the child who shows through the language and who finds his own voice in the act of talking or writing. Through all language activity, but particularly through the reflective act of writing, the child learns more about himself as he recreates and examines his own experience; he learns more about others as he imaginatively creates their lives; he makes sense of the world he inhabits as through language his intellect finds relationships, generalities, solutions, theories. We concentrate on things of lesser importance if we concentrate on the correctness or otherwise of the language, and we would argue that, by a concentration on the surface aspects of written language, we mislead the child as to the nature of writing and its purposes and possibilities.

It is sometimes argued that there is no need to teach certain children to write as they will seldom write in adult life. Not only would illiteracy demand a serious social price from such children but all children have to live in a literate society and much of the **spoken** language that children hear around them, the language of education, of officialdom, of serious discussion, is disciplined and organised by the language of writing. According to various reports, recent years have seen a decline in the practice of writing in a number of Scottish schools – possibly because a misinterpretation of the aims of 'creative writing' has encouraged some teachers to see personal and imaginative writing as a 'frill'. The child's personal writing is not a frill. It is important in itself but it is doubly important in that other, more abstract, forms of writing, will have their origins in this personal form of writing. If a child is not encouraged to express himself freely and naturally through speech and writing about things that concern him, then the very roots of more complex forms of language will wither.

It may be difficult to teach certain children the conventions of writing. What is even more difficult is to help the child to find things of significance for himself intellectually. A child's writing becomes more effective – not because language changes – but because the child changes. He begins to establish a new relationship, a new stance, to the world around and he begins to create new worlds for himself and others. If we change the ways in which a child makes sense of, enjoys and uses the world of people, creatures, objects and ideas that he inhabits then his language, the way in which he writes, must change. If we ask the child to engage with inert words, torn from their context and put in lists and exercises, then there is no guarantee that anything, even language, will change. **You cannot change language by changing language: you have to change the child using language.**

That is why language work can be so difficult and that is why one of the most, if not **the** most, important factors in the development of writing skills is the sensitivity of the teacher to what the child is trying to express through his writing. In this paper we deal with many aspects of writing and it may be easy in the wealth of detail to lose sight of the fact that there can be no language growth separate from the child's personal and social development and the creation in the classroom of a rich environment that provides opportunities for writing – whether that environment exists physically in the classroom, or is created through the imagination and perception of the child.

If we are to help a child develop through language then we have to know as much as we can about how language operates. The ability to identify error in spelling or punctuation is only a small, though not unimportant, part of that knowledge about language. This paper is a mixture of theory and practice. We make no apology for this. It is sometimes alleged that the Scottish teacher is not interested in

theory. Yet so much has been discovered in recent years about how children use language and much of this knowledge has not been put into the hands of teachers. We have to recognise that many things that go on within language work – assumptions about the language children bring to school, assumptions about the child's understanding of the purposes of 'school' language, the effectiveness of developing language through rules of grammar and through text-book exercises-seem to be contrary to the knowledge that we now have about how children acquire and use language.

In this paper we choose not to discuss the writing of poetry. (A sub-committee of SCOLA is currently investigating the teaching of poetry in schools.) In a classroom where poetry is valued and where children take part in reading poetry and talking about it many will turn spontaneously to the writing of poetry. Many of the techniques discussed in later sections of this paper may lead to poetry-writing. We leave the detailed discussion of such writing to a later paper which will be one of a series developing points made in this.

This is not a research paper and you will not find many direct references to investigations into children's language – although the points made in this paper can be substantiated. We believe that what this paper says about the social influences on language, the differences between speech and writing, the way in which writing seems to develop – and many other things – do represent a reality that affects what we choose to do in the classroom.

We hope that teachers will be prepared to examine their own assumptions about the teaching of writing in the light of the arguments advanced in this paper.

2. HAND IN YOUR WRITING: AN EXAMINATION OF CHILDREN'S WRITING.

When a teacher asks a class to hand in their writing she may receive writing like the following:

1. *The subject that interests me most is motor cars. One Saturday while the motor show was on at the Kelvin Hall. We travelled down by car. We left the car at my Great Auntie who lives in Glasgow. So we went to get a bus. When we entered the door of the Kelvin Hall, a lady at a desk took our money and gave us tickets. When we entered facing us was the Riley Elf and the Wolseley Hornet. There were lorries as well. There were Foden's, A.E.C.s, Albions, Leylands, etc. They were selling books. Pamphelits was about the only thing for nothing. I got an A.E.C. International Motor Club badge. On it was ACLO, when we left the motor show we went back to my Great Aunties for tea. We left about 7.30 p.m. On the way back it began to snow. Of course, it was October the 30th. I think that is about all.*

2. *One tuesday morning at half past nine our classes were going on a trip to Ayr the bell rang we all lined up we went up to our classrooms. we all sat down. The teacher said what's the rule. "Do not go out to the middle of the road." "Do not run across buzy roads." "Do not fight."*
Brian said there's the buses. The teacher said stand in two's My frien Catherine said partner I said yes we went down stairs we were so excited some of the boys kicked the girls going down stairs. John kicked Gladys and she shouted watch it. I started to laugh we went up stairs the other class went down below the bus we were singing and laughing. Miss ..... was up stairs with my class. Mrs. ..... said we were going to Pressweak airport first. We were eating and smuggling our sweets. We stopped at Pressweak airport first. We went out of the bus. We went into the airport there were no areoplanes landing or taking of. We saw an elocopter landing the teacher said do you just want to go on to Ayr we said yes we went on the bus singing. after all that we were at Ayr we got off the buss. Miss ..... took a couple of Poeple to the amusements and Mrs. ..... took a couple of Poeple to the beach after all that we went back on the bus on our way.

3. *I was going to the canvel. and when i got i run over to one machine I cape won my big bother was taken all my money I said no I told my mum she. said gave her money back He said no my mum said go and to your dad I whent and told my dad He said. were is He. over there. I said He will not gave my money back. He said gave her money Back He said no my dad kurd him He said here. I whent to play agine I was sitty won I play the girl machine I won a picket of cipst, I play it agine I put my five p in and I got a jar with honey in it. it was time to go home. I got home my mum said go and mack a cup of Tea I said have you attren cake, my dad said gave her that cake. To we get a cup of tea. I make three cup of tea and three bit of cake.*

Here we have three children trying to communicate their memories of a day that had particular significance for them. The children chose what they wanted to write about. The first thing we notice is their varying command over the conventions of writing. The first boy is reasonably competent and has reached that level of writing skill where he can introduce some variety into his sentence structures. Even in the weakest (No. 3) we see some awareness of the rules of spelling and punctuation. Some of the errors that this pupil makes arise from her feeling that there should be something there – a capital letter, a way of spelling, the use of punctuation. In all of these pieces, correct usages come and go demonstrating a grasp of writing skills that cannot stand up to the demands of writing narrative.

All of them have one thing in common; the writers find it difficult to convey to their readers what it was that made this day so special. The first boy can construct a narrative but if he has a special interest in cars this never comes through apart from the ubiquitous list. We have no 'feel' of what it was like to be in the Kelvin Hall during the Motor Show. There is no one exhibit that appears to have particularly interested him. The second piece of writing has a liveliness about it and the third, despite grave weaknesses, catches some of the give-and-take of dialogue, but in all of them there is the same difficulty in finding and communicating from amongst the stream of events what it was that made this day so significant. The logistics of getting to Ayr or the Kelvin Hall, the consumption of food or money dominate. The writer is not always mindful of the fact that we weren't there and some of the references are meaningless for that reason. The children don't seem able to identify what it is that their readers might be interested in and so we get all without selection – the banal and the potentially interesting. We know what they did on that day but what was it like for them? We get a naming of events in a time sequence. If these events really have significance and if the child didn't choose to describe an outing because he/she could think of nothing else, then we have to supply that significance

from our own experience. Even if this kind of writing is competent it still cannot escape being uninvolved and, consequently, dull.

We read with a sense of disappointment. Can the writers read their work with any sense of pride?

4. *Ginty was a small, podgy dog. It was coloured grey. It was a border terrier. Ginty loved eating wasps. She jumped in the air and caught them in her mouth.*

   Ginty didn't have many habits but one habit she had was to sit in the middle of the road when a car came. Ginty just sat. The car's horn was peeping but Ginty just sat. Then the car driver got out his car and picked Ginty up and walked over to the side of the road and put Ginty down but Ginty was not contented so she walked back and seated herself in the middle of the road. My Mum had just got down the stair when she saw Ginty in the middle of the road and the red-faced car driver. Then she realised what had happened. She shouted, "Ginty." Ginty came sadly in.

   Ginty did a lot of things wrong. Once when Ginty was getting older a funny thing happened. Dicky's dad had put a hare in his shed. Five minutes later Ginty comes along the road with a hare the size of itself gripped tightly between her jaws. Dicky's dad chased after Ginty and grabbed the hare from her jaws.

   Ginty seemed to get old quick. She went deaf and blind. My mum decided to put her down. My Mum took her to the vet. The vet gave her an injection which put her to sleep for ever.

Most readers would find this piece more interesting than the previous ones. It is not better because the child has access to 'more' language than the others. It is more interesting because the child has both sensitivity and an understanding of what writing can do to select items which bring Ginty to life for us. It is this boy's having something to say that makes him draw on his language resources – not his language resources making him aware of things about Ginty. Look at the words. There are few there which would not be available to the other three children.

We have spoken of the first three pieces of writing as being 'uninvolved' and of the reader's sense of disappointment. Much of the writing that is handed over by primary children appears to have been produced to satisfy the demands of the teacher. Certainly it does not always read as if it satisfied the needs of the children producing it. In this kind of situation the teacher does not seem to be seen as a real audience whose curiosity, interest – or ignorance – has to be satisfied.

Hopefully we look for writing that is more than merely correct – writing that means as much to the child-author as did this young boy's pirate story, complete with sound effects, or the older girl's account of a playground squabble that lifts above the simple listing of actions but without ever becoming sensational.

5. *One night as black as cole a pirate and his crew crept onto the ship. Pirate pet began to look his his crew crep a round to try and find the tresher. Klang crash a pirate pickle dropt a tin. Fool of water he woce up the other pirate. Quickly he got drest and got his guns. He went and tolt the others. That were crule viced bolded crocet patched on his eye. All the pirots started to fite. They got thair sharp silvry sord. Out and began to fite. Pirate Pete was geting the oter men from the ship. More and more got cild pirate pete was fiting the oter one eyed man. He got his temper up and tryd to cill pirate pete. He could not cill him pirate pete got him at the ege of the ship. Aaaaaaaaaa splash he got him in the salty water. He got drownd pirate pete got tresher from the man he got trone ofer board. After Pete got tresher. He salde out of the place the one eyed man and his crew was dead. 40 of pirat pet men were still alayv. He went away with the tresher. His men got a share of it. And went saling out with his men and crew.*

Who would dare write 'Spelling' after that?

6. *I was standing in the playground next to the railings all alone as I had fallen out with my friends or rather they had fallen out with me. They were standing in a group, five of them altogether and now and then they would give a quick glance at me. I knew they were talking about me. I walked away from where I had been standing and went behind a wall where they could not see me. I stood there for a few minutes then my curiosity overcame me, I must see what they were doing. I peeked round the wall and saw them approaching me. I felt like running but I knew if I did five of them would easily corner me. I gulped and gripped my hands tightly together. The larges of them came up and gave me a sly grin. Then it happened so quickly she struck me in the face. I hit her back then she kicked and I thumped. A crowd gathered and I could hear the mocking voices around me, some supporting her, others me. I felt my eye swelling and as I opened it slowly I saw the girl on*

the ground, her nose was bleeding. The others smiled at me and the girl who was now standing up said, "let's be friends." I had won the fight.

It would be naive to claim that this girl had never read schoolgirl stories but the blend of the experienced and the borrowed gives this story an effectiveness lacking in the first three examples. Again we note the economy in the story – the girl only uses that material relevant to the development of the story and the recording of her feelings. Sometimes the connections between the various items are not made explicit as they would be with a less able writer – and look at the opening which takes us right into the heart of the action.

Similarly our young boy has been read to and can probably read. He will certainly have watched T.V. and will have read so-called comic books. We make too little of the positive influence of watching T.V. and reading comic books. Such experiences give a repertoire of situations and characters and along with story books and children's fiction they provide children with awarenesses of how to set about constructing an exciting narrative and how to communicate character, action and feelings with verve and attack.

We suspect that both these children enjoyed writing their stories. The skills they are acquiring in writing are not just at the service of fantasy or autobiography. The ability to select, to shape, to show relationships, to comment, to draw inferences – skills which children may deploy in their personal and imaginative writing – will increasingly be as effectively deployed in their observations of natural phenomena, their writing-up of science experiments or of the conclusions they draw from historical or geographical data as the balance shifts towards this kind of writing.

What these children are engaged in is not a 'frill'; they are developing writing strategies that will eventually meet any demand made on them.

3. IS THIS ALL THERE IS TO WRITE ABOUT? – SOME QUESTIONS ARISING FROM THE ABOVE EXAMINATION.

7. *My class had a party yesterday and our first game was the grandel joc of york. And we had a lot of dancing and then we all had crisps and something to drink and then we plaied the balloon game and did some more dancing and then we had beba-babty and then we all went home.*

8. *I like it because it was good and I liked the man and the woman in the space rocket and I liked batman and the policeman Jason was shouting batman at the end it was good.*

9. *Today is Tuesday the 11th of October. It is cold. The news is We are getting our photographs taken today. And my mum is going to hospital.*

Why do children write like this?

DO THESE CHILDREN HAVE LITTLE OR NOTHING TO TELL US?

Are they not aware of anything significant in the experiences they have had? Have they no response to make to them?

Such a point of view would be quite untenable. We only have to listen to children talking to their friends to know this.

The girl who went to that party had got a new dress and shoes. She felt grown-up. She was aware of noise, movement, colour. She was happy but she was old enough to be apprehensive about her popularity amongst the boys.

The young boy who went to the circus experienced all kinds of emotions. On the whole he had been happy and excited but at times he had been frightened and at other times rather bored.

The boy whose mother was going to hospital was not happy about it. He didn't like visiting in hospital and complicated arrangements had to be made to look after him and his younger sister. It is unlikely that getting his photograph taken was the most important news he had that day yet the important fact of the day is tagged on at the end. (The daily news item or diary entry must be one of the most effective ways of training children how not to set about writing. The structure of it, the assumptions behind it, the fact that little is done with the news, all simply aggravate the worst aspects of children's writing.)

We know these things about these children's response to their experience because they told their teachers about them during discussion. What they chose to tell us in their writing did not represent what they had got out of the situation – it wasn't even what the children had felt to be the most important things that had happened to them.

IS IT BECAUSE THEY HAVE NO VOCABULARY?

Some teachers would say this about some children in their classes.

What words would change the girl's account of the party into something that caught the meaning of it for her?

Hot? Excited? Shy? Proud? Colourful? Tasty? Fizzy? Shining? Nervous? Whirling?

These are all simple words. Would the average senior girl not know them?

The girl could read them when she met them in print. She volunteered them when the teacher discussed the party with her. She understood them when the teacher used them. Obviously a child's vocabulary is capable of being extended but most children who do not have special needs have a vocabulary that is adequate to communicate their everyday experiences.

Why didn't these children use these words?

IS IT BECAUSE THEY CANNOT CONSTRUCT SENTENCES?

It can be demonstrated that a child entering school has access to a range of sentence structures that approximates to that of an adult. The difference between competence and lack of competence seems to be one of quantity of use rather than possession of a different range of structures.

Listen to young children talking. Do they never say things like:

"I'm telling my Mummy 'cos you're naughty."

"I'm going to be a Mummy when I'm a big girl."

"If you give me a sweet I'll give you a shot on my bike."

Primary children use a wide range of syntactical structures and they understand them when adults use them.

Why do many children not seem to use them when they write?

It would appear that most children have something to tell us; they have access to a reasonably adequate vocabulary, although it may be a passive one; they have access to a range of syntactical structures.

The answer must lie elsewhere.

4. WHERE MAY FAILURE LIE? – HOME BACKGROUND.

SOCIAL INFLUENCES ON WRITING

The child learns his language in a social situation. Within this situation writing may not be very important. The child may not observe adults involved in writing as a self-chosen and pleasurable activity. The child may not understand what writing is for, how it functions or the techniques that sustain it. Certain children will have such an understanding; they may have heard adults discussing aspects of writing like what to put into a letter or the spelling of words. Letters may have been read out and the child asked if he wants to copy a few words into the letter or to dictate a message. Where these activities take place the child begins to have awarenesses about writing that make it easier for him to write when he comes to school. The reading of stories by parents gives some sense of a writing vocabulary and structure. The simple alphabet games played by some mothers give him a useful tool for beginning writing. For some children there will be little motivation or understanding.

It is often argued that the most important influence on the child's language performance in school is the quantity and the quality of the speech situations in which the child is involved at home. A more important determiner of the child's level of attainment after entering school, and as measured by various language tests, would appear to be the value that is placed on literacy in the home and the child's introduction to reading and writing – even the ability to write a few words and read even isolated phrases. School language increasingly deals with items not in the immediate situation. Written language is essentially context-free and the child's ability to use this language is highly significant in determining success in school.

When we say that the child learns language in a social situation we are referring to more than items like vocabulary, structures, accent. Each social group will have its own set of values and some of these values will be about language. Some ways of using language may not be highly regarded within certain social groups. If this is the case then the child may not learn to use language in these ways. If we listen to people describing their experiences or giving their opinion of something they have participated in it is obvious that certain groups may not value highly explicit personal responses. What may be more common is the use of stereotypes of various kinds. "It was simply fantastic." The speaker may appeal to common knowledge about the topic: "You know what I mean." "You know the kind of thing." "Of course they are all at it." On other occasions we may be aware that logical demonstration of proof is less favoured than appeal to an outside authority. "Well, I saw it on the television." "But it was in the paper; it must be true."

If a child is brought up within a group that does not commonly use highly explicit personal responses nor logical demonstration of proof then it is less likely that he will learn how to use language for these purposes. It is not that he doesn't have the language, i.e. the words and structures; he doesn't understand how to use language for these purposes. This could mean that the child who functions perfectly well within the language expectations of his own group might find himself in difficulty in a situation where different expectations obtain. The child may well find such a situation in school.

When a teacher asks a child to report on something he has experienced or observed, the teacher is really expecting that the child will report explicitly and in an organised manner. The child may never have been in this kind of situation before. He does not share in the teacher' expectations. He will respond as he would within his own group and this may not be acceptable. The difficulty may be that the teacher may not appreciate that the child does not share in his expectations about how language should be used. He may regard the child as lacking in intelligence or as having language problems. Neither of these may be true. The child may simply not know what he is expected to do.

Children do not come to the experiences offered by school as free agents. They will see experience through the eyes of their social group, i.e. they will share in the values of that group. They will tend to share the group's values about many diverse things – rich people, religion, colour, swots, poetry, classical music, food. Teachers recognise this. Teachers have also to recognise that the child also shares in the group's values in language. Certain ways of using language may not be important. The child will not learn how to use language in these ways. If these ways are valued by school then school will have to increase its efforts to teach them.

We have to remember that experience with spoken language may not be enough. Speech situations may not develop that explicit and ordered language that is essential in writing. Speech may not give children experience with that form of abstracted language existing outside an immediate situation, the use of which is so vital in school success. Only reading and writing can do this.

The inability of a child to operate effectively in certain writing situations may have its origins in the way in which adults in his social group expect him to use language. It would appear that many parents,

no matter how affectionate, do not really expect the child to report to them on the quality of the experiences he has had or to make available to them his **emotional responses** to various situations. A simple statement of what happened appears to be sufficient – after all, parents have usually shared in the same experience at some time and can project their own understandings into what the child says. Besides, the child is there and if parents feel the need for any more information they can ask questions.

When a child returns home he may be asked:

"Where were you?"

The child may reply:

"Out with my pals."

The child is not really expected to say much more as the questions which the parent may continue to ask may be regulatory or controlling questions.

"Were you with that Tommy Smith again? I thought I told you not to play with him?"

"And what time is this to be coming home?"

If the child were to be asked for his evaluation of the evening it might be expressed in stereotypes.

"I was up at Tommy's playing his new L.P. It was great."

"Tommy's Dad took us for a run in his new car. It goes like a bomb."

This is sufficient for the listener who knows what criteria to apply when appraising a pop record or a trip in a new car. It may not be sufficient for a teacher, and it will certainly not be sufficient in writing where the child is communicating with a non-present reader who c not ask questions and cannot be assumed to have shared in the same experiences.

Should the parent decide to control the child's behaviour there is no guarantee that this will be done through rational argument using more complex forms of language, such as:

"Now, look son, you know this is no time to come in because your Mother worries about you after all the trouble there has been round here. It's not as if you haven't been told time and time again."

Control may simply derive from authority:

"I'm not telling you again."

or from a kind of emotional blackmail:

"You know your mother's not been too well recently."

The child involved in rational argument learns something about how to conduct such an argument and develops a more sensitive awareness of how his behaviour affects other people. Importantly he learns a way of using language denied to the child faced with authority or blackmail. The latter may have little experience of language divorced from the personal or from an immediate context.

The second child is involved with spoken language uses which are not an adequate preparation for the writing tasks he may encounter in school. The teacher will assume that the child can use written language, as she uses written language, but less correctly and less effectively. It may not occur to the teacher that the child's difficulty is neither a lack of experience nor a lack of language but rather a failure to understand the nature of the task being set him.

Children may come to school with a 'trained incapacity' in language. It may not be that they do not have the capacity to perform certain language functions; it may be that society has taught them, unconsciously, not to be able to perform some of the tasks that schools may wish to set them. What the child brings with him to school is his language and the experiences and values stored in that language. It is unrealistic to expect that the young child can assume the teacher's expectations and values. The teacher has to start where the child is and, assuming nothing, develop those language skills and language uses which the child may not have learned in his own social environment.

5. WHERE MAY FAILURE LIE? – THE NATURE OF WRITING.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SPEECH AND WRITING

Anything that can be said can be written down. This is true but the result may not be 'writing'. Perhaps we should say that anything that can be said can be written but not in the way in which it is said. This probably sounds confusing but it has to be understood. We can make a transcript of anything that can be said but the result, while written down, is not 'writing' as writing has its own way of structuring itself and its own range of vocabulary elements that make it different from speech. There are significant differences between speech and writing and unless a child is aware of these differences – **and to be aware does not mean to be able to express** – then he will be confused about the functions and techniques of writing.

We have touched on some of the differences between speech and writing. Writer and reader do not share the same physical context and the writer cannot make direct reference to that context as he might do were he talking instead of writing. If a speaker and his listener are in the same context the speaker might refer to 'that chair' and point to it. In writing the writer will have to indicate the particular chair purely through words.

The writer has no guarantee that his reader brings the same body of knowledge to the act of communication that he does. There is no way of testing this. If the writer's assumptions are quite different from those of his reader and misunderstanding occurs there is no way the writer can probe these assumptions as he could in a face-to-face situation. The writer has to develop a sense of audience. He has to anticipate what his reader needs to know and wants to know. There is no instant feed-back in writing.

Writing is not supported by non-verbal communication – tone of voice, gesture, etc. The information carried by these, and they are important in the communication of emotion, has to be rendered in words.

Writing is a sustained act of communication. There is no exchange of roles – the listener becoming the speaker and so on. The necessity to sustain an unbroken flow of communication creates problems for the less-skilled writer.

The writer is expected to 'edit-out' certain features that occur in speech. In speech, digressions, repetitions, asides, etc. are permitted. This is not so in writing. The problem is that these digressions often represent places where the speaker is finding it difficult to formulate his ideas. Repetitions and digressions enable the speaker to talk round the difficulty until he finds a solution. They also slow down the rate at which new information is made available to the listener and thereby increase his chances of understanding. All this is not possible in writing and creates problems for the young or less able writers who have to work out their ideas in the flow of narrative.

Because writing is sustained communication and there are no external interruptions as in speech, the teacher may wish to avoid monotony by 'editing out' such features as the kind of slack coordination using 'and – and – and' that is frequent in the writing of less-able writers. She may urge younger writers to strive for variety in sentence structure; she may exhort older writers to seek a certain elegance in style. The building up of more complex ideas by simply adding one item to another through coordination may be easier for some children than trying to build up these complex ideas through the use of subordination. The child's use of 'and – and – and' may be less of an offence against style and more the child's attempt to deal with complex or sustained impressions or ideas in a stream of narrative. In addition, the task set by the teacher may positively encourage the child to name a series of events by its concentration on "what happened next".

Because the writer cannot refer to things in a shared context and because he cannot use non-verbal

communication he has to be more explicit in writing than he would have to be in speech. He has to 'edit in' certain vocabulary and syntactical items. This may be difficult as there is no present listener whose probing questions or feed-back may call into being the writer's passive knowledge of language. Certain classes of words, e.g. function words like conjunctions, may assume greater importance in writing as the writer has to demonstrate more explicitly the relationship between statements. These are words which are not usually taught to children as they have no referential meaning – they are not the name of anything.

Although writing is less economical than speech in certain respects – inability to refer to a shared context or to use non-verbal communication – writing is generally much more explicit and tightly ordered than speech. This necessity to be explicit and to employ 'tighter' structures creates problems for young writers and readers.

Let us suppose that a child has to convey to his audience that he has bought an apple that is big, red, and juicy. The child may see this message as having several components – 'buying an apple; a big apple; a red apple; a juicy apple.'

In speech the child may say: "I bought an apple. It was a big apple and it was a red and juicy one."

The child might write: "I bought an apple and it was big and red and juicy."

The teacher might look for more economy in the writing and expect the describing items to precede the noun: "I bought a big, red, juicy apple."

The child understands each of the components making up this message. There is no breakdown in meaning as he tries to communicate through writing. The difficulty could lie in the expectation that he will communicate several meanings within one simple structure. The child reading this same message could have the same difficulty and fail to pick up all the meanings because they are encoded in one simple statement.

Again we see that writing may make certain linguistic and intellectual demands on the child for which speech may not have prepared him. It is not likely that admonition or the use of decontextualised text-book exercises will help the child through these difficulties.

Young children simply don't seem to think of communicating as being a problem; as Piaget says they have no suspicion of the appalling density of the human mind. They believe that they both understand and are understood. They do not appreciate the lack of informativeness in what they say and write. This is clear from some of the pieces of writing already discussed.

We cannot assume that children will come to school understanding what is involved in communication with a non-present audience. Where could many of them have got this understanding? The spoken language of the home will not provide it although involvement with literacy in the home may. This is something we have to teach. Writing demands a completeness and an explicitness for which speech situations have not prepared the child. As he has to grapple with these problems while sustaining a flow of writing it would appear sensible to lessen his difficulties by making writing less of a 'one-shot' effort than it is in many classes. The discussion of possible approaches to a topic; the use of notes and jottings; the use of drafting and editing techniques would all seem to help the child to produce writing that is satisfying to the child and meaningful to the reader and we will examine these techniques at a later stage in the document.

6. WHERE MAY FAILURE LIE? – IN SCHOOL.

I ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT LANGUAGE

If we look beyond things like the child's use of vocabulary and syntax and examine the purposes for which a child uses writing we may find out rather more about the assumptions of the school than about the child's writing ability. In a society like ours where most writing that a child does is done in school, effective writing is whatever the school wishes it to be.

A background to this document was the examination of some thousands of pieces of children's writing. The striking thing about this sample was not the wide variety of children's voices speaking through this writing but the uniformity. In areas like personal recall or imaginative writing where we might have looked for individuality we found a remarkable similarity. Children asked to write on experiences that they had enjoyed tended to choose school trips or outings of some kind. Within these accounts the emphasis was on simple data – the chronological recording of journeys and events and the listing of things consumed. If there were to be a suitable motto for what these children are encouraged to write about it could be: "I consume therefore I am."

Imaginative writing was a crude or sophisticated rehash of television adventures or comic book stories – a diet of Draculas, Star Trek or ghosts. Where there was detail, it was frequently to be found in the replicating of details from the model: "Activate the deflector shields and fire phasers." Again we have to ask: "Why do children write like this? Is this all that they are capable of?" Evidence from other schools within the sample shows that this is not the case. Some of the pieces of writing quoted in this document demonstrate what children can do when working within a stimulating programme.

There are several factors that may have contributed to this sterile uniformity – this cloned writing. The pieces of writing were frequently one-off pieces completed within an hour or so and without an opportunity for re-drafting. However this was also the case with many of the more effective pieces. Where children were allowed to choose their own topic they obviously didn't know what to choose. They usually chose to write about some incident that had occurred in the immediate past or about some school-based activity. In the majority of cases the child's own life seemed devoid of significant material. It was obvious that many children could not handle the 'day-at-the ...' type of topic that they chose. It was far too big. They found it difficult to say what made them happy – who but a teacher would ask such a question? – unless happiness involved the spending of money.

It is quite difficult to recall our own experience with detail and vividness. Even in speech, adults need the stimulus of other people's anecdotes to set them off. The children in the sample didn't seem to know how to find material that would amuse, excite or even interest anyone else. The identification of details from their own life that had significance for them or which won a response from them – the kind of thing that some of the children quoted in this document can do – seemed beyond them. Instead we have reams of triviality.

We have argued that the kind of dialogue that many children have with their parents may not encourage them to volunteer significant information about their own experiences but surely schools provide appropriate models? We have to contemplate the possiblity that the criteria for effective writing may be as poorly conceptualised by teachers as by children. Teachers may assume that children should be able to find the content of writing for themselves and that the school's function is to improve performance. If the content should turn out to be weak then this can be attributed to some inability in the child and not to the school's failure to make the child aware of the purposes of writing and where he may find material to satisfy these purposes. If a child sees the main purpose in writing as pleasing the teacher, or simply as giving practice in writing – as many of them do – then he will try to do those things that a teacher wants.

Think of a child's progress through writing. In the infant classroom he may draw a picture and write under it: 'This is my mummy.' He will probably receive a commending tick for this and any feed-back will probably be about handwriting or spelling. The fact that this is simple labelling – that there is nothing of the child in this – may go unremarked. The child may progress to news-time: "Last night I went to my granny's. I watched television and had chips." Again, provided this statement is formally correct, the child's work will probably be accepted. Looking at the kind of comments that teachers write on children's scripts, it can be argued that much of the feed-back is about error. There may be little attempt to expand or enrich content. Along with this kind of writing, the child will be involved with numerous text-book exercises – dozens and dozens of examples – designed to improve correctness.

What does the child make of all this? He probably comes to the conclusion that the main thing in writing is to be correct and tidy. As he goes on writing the kind of pieces we saw at the beginning of

this document, he will also conclude that the teacher is satisfied with his recalling simple undifferentiated data in a chronological sequence or with imaginative stories in which the emphasis is on the narrative. It may not occur to him that the teacher – or anyone else – is interested in the details of his experience. He sees the teacher as an examiner and not as an interested and responsive audience. The child will begin his writing in school by simply writing down whatever comes to mind. The teacher takes this writing and sees her role as being essentially the improvement of performance.

Is there any guarantee that the child will see writing as a communicative process where what he writes has any real purpose?

Is it likely that the child will see writing as a means whereby we search for meaning?

Is it likely that he will delight in himself as an author?

All those uninvolved, even if correct, pieces of writing were not produced because this is all that pupils can do. They were produced because the assumptions that schools make about writing create similar assumptions in the minds of children.

How long can we continue with writing programmes that trivialise the daily experience of children?

II WRITING AS A SYSTEMATIC STUDY

Writing may be practised and tested in schools but it may not be taught systematically. There is little evidence from the various reports to suggest that the majority of schools have a coherent approach to writing. The child may not be introduced to writing in a way that develops his sense of audience, encourages explicitness, and motivates him to express his experiences and imaginings. Many of the practices that are common in school cannot be shown to have any connection with the ways in which adults and children set about writing. The dependence of many schools on decontextualised exercises simply does not develop the writing skills discussed in this paper. Let us take an example.

The following work comes from a P.6 class. The school provided the total week's written output and this pupil's work was chosen at random. We reproduce the child's written work over two days. The other written work submitted consisted of a large number of computation exercises and work sheets in mathematics.

10. *Today is Monday the 10th of October. It is cold, the news is, Yesterday I saw a car crash in Glasgow.*

animal	*animal*	*animal*
donkey	*donkey*	*donkey*
monkey	*monkey*	*monkey*
monkeys	*monkeys*	*monkeys*
port	*port*	*port*
tide	*tide*	*tide*
shore	*shore*	*shore*
coast	*coast*	*coast*

1. *The people looked at the tall animal.*
2. *I got a ride on a donkey.*
3. *My dad used to have a pet monkey.*
4. *I saw three monkeys.*
5. *The boys all played port and starboard.*
6. *The tide came in very quickly.*
7. *The children had to stay ashore.*
8. *We had a long way to go before we got to the coast.*

1. *Anna'a mother couldn't wear beautiful clothes or jewels because she was very poor.*
2. *Anna planed to grow up and earn a lot of money to buy a big house and servants for her mother.*
3. *The name of the ballet was Sleeping Beauty.*
4. *(a) The noblemen were in velvet suits of black and crimson.*
   (b) There were ladies in pink and satin.
   (c) Each fairy gave a present and a wish to the little princess.
5. *The lilac fairys feet moved like magic.*

6.

ed	ing	
leaned	*noticing*	*jumping*
danced	*dancing*	*hanging*
seemed	*listening*	*chattering*
closed	*rising*	*walking*
whirled	*whirling*	*sleeping*
	dancing	

7. *(a) This is a sledge.*
   (b) It has bells.
   (c) Anna did hear the bells.

8. *(a) Even at night in her dreams she danced.*
   (b) Dancers have to practise and practise.
   (c) Her feet touched the floor so lightly.

11. *Today is Tuesday the 11th of October. It is cold. The news is we are getting our photographs taken to day. And my mum is going to hospital.*

1. *A drawing lesson often lasts for an hour.*
2. *On one page there were a hundred sums.*
3. *The only lady was trying to find a home for her puppy.*
4. *It is an honour to be chosen for the first team.*
5. *She was an honest girl because she took the money she found to her mother.*
6. *In the field we could see a horse and several cows.*

1. *horse, mouse, rabbit, squirrel, tortoise.*
2. *April, December, January, March, November.*
3. *His father asked him to open the door.*
4. *He made his mistake when he tried to divide the number.*
5. *We all stand when we go into the school hall.*
6. *I shall never forget what happened.*
7. *During the game we had to lose our partners.*
8. *Some children seem to hate to go to bed.*
9. *We tried to do our best to make the toy boat sink.*
10. *John tried hard to miss the ball.*

How might teachers justify these activities? Some teachers may claim that children are practising writing skills away from the demands of the writing situation but how individualised and how relevant are they? Other teachers may claim that such exercises keep children usefully occupied while the teacher works with individuals, but are these children usefully occupied?

We have seen some of the difficulties that confront children when they write. How far do these exercises provide the conditions under which children may acquire an awareness of the functions and techniques of writing?

Consider the following points:

There was no continuous writing during these two days. The only continuous writing during the week was a dictation test. There was no writing within other curriculum areas like history, geography or science.

The diary, or daily news-items are trivial. We know that the child could say more about these events given the opportunity. These items do not even have the merit of being correct. They encourage the least desirable elements in writing being uninvolved, superficial and simple in structure. Worst of all they create in the child, and possibly in the teacher, the idea that this is what writing is all about — the simple naming of randomly selected events.

The sentences that the child writes in response to the questions in the text-book do not provide an opportunity for the child to deploy anything but the most simple language skills. These sentences are short, repetitive in structure, and provide only limited opportunity for the use of phrases or subordinate clauses.

The sentences written are answers to literal comprehension questions in which the child has to write down isolated fragments of fact from a passage read. Alternatively they provide frameworks in which the child may embed spelling words, opposites, etc. Each word in these sentences has meaning but the sentences have no meaning for the child. This is a meaningless activity. How can the child be helped to develop a sense of what writing is about from such activities? The so-called communication here is quite spurious. This is not a **serious** activity.

How do we justify the quite arbitrary selection of the words used for spelling or vocabulary exercises? Was there any evidence that the children in this class could not spell or understand these words? We would be surprised if there were. Words are plucked out of the air to provide material for exercises which fulfil no real purpose but which are sanctified by use. This is simply a waste of valuable time. It is not as if these activities do no good – they do positive harm in creating wrong assumptions in the child's mind about what writing is for and how we set about it.

What linguistic weaknesses are being remedied here? Are we to suppose that the majority of P.6 children cannot use '-ed' or '-ing'? Would not a moment's perfunctory observation of their speech and writing reveal that this is not so? Why teach children things in writing that they can do and ignore things that they most obviously cannot do?

Despite the fact that it has been demonstrated over and over again that there is no correlation between the ability to complete this kind of exercise and success in writing, the **SCOLA Survey** and the HMI's Report, **Learning and Teaching in Primary 4 and Primary 7**, would suggest that primary children spent a great deal of time completing these exercises within the school week. The exercises can have no relationship to the demonstrated weaknesses of the pupils in this class and they are in no way related to the kind of writing difficulties that children are likely to encounter. If they worked we would have no weaknesses in written language at the P.7 or secondary level after all the years that children spend completing sentences, filling in blanks, finding opposites, giving plurals, past tenses, etc., etc. Children seldom make errors in the language items taught in these exercises. They are simply mechanical time-fillers. There has to be careful identification of the nature of the writing difficulties encountered by children and the selection of activities to remove them. Reading, writing, and discussion within a stimulating environment are required – not this kind of meaningless ritual.

III CREATIVE WRITING

The 'creative writing' movement was one reaction against the domination of school writing by decontextualised exercises and the traditional school essay. There can be little doubt that creative writing approaches have led to significant improvements in children's writing. It is difficult to reduce creative approaches to a programmed body of material and there is little doubt that they make considerable demands on the sensitivity and linguistic skill of teachers. While many teachers work happily within the less-structured situations associated with creative approaches there are others who are less at ease. There has been misunderstanding of the teacher's role, and there may have been a tolerance of poor work and an over-zealous jettisoning of formal conventions. Aims and techniques have not always been clearly articulated. While acknowledgement is made of the importance of the child's expression of his own awarenesses and imaginings, there is evidence from discussion with teachers that some have doubts about the value of such activities or may even be unsympathetic towards them.

The importance of teacher attitude towards creative writing or teacher uncertainty as to how to evaluate it becomes more evident when we consider some of the effects that the concept of creative writing has on writing in school.

Creative writing is seen as having to do with the personal and imaginative experience of the child. One much-criticised technique is the evoking of the child's response to some stimulus. The child's writing is valued for the vividness of the sensory or affective detail. Children may produce impressive work under such conditions but it has to be remembered that the precise expression of personal response is a form of language use which is not developed highly within society and presents difficulty for many children and adults. Moreover it is possible to manipulate the child to produce an essentially dishonest response, but one replete with the obligatory epithets and similes. In some cases this stimulus-response type of writing is as artificial as that which it sought to replace. As creative writing becomes that form of writing that is most actively taught in schools, there may be less attention paid to those forms of writing not concerned with emotion or sensory awareness – those forms of writing through which the child reports on his observations, collects and investigates data, and constructs hypotheses. There are few writing approaches in which a child is explicitly taught how to set about such things; it seems to be assumed that the child simply acquires them. If we look at writing produced not as a result of stimulus/response situations but within contexts which naturally produce a variety of types of writing we see that this distinction between the 'thinking' child and the 'feeling' child does not exist. It is the same child with the same intellectual, imaginative, sensory and affective apparatus who is recalling, observing, imagining and speculating. Personal recall makes intellectual

demands on the child as he struggles to make sense of experience; science calls emotion into being as the child is intrigued or delighted by what he observes. It would appear perverse to suggest that the following piece of writing, one item from a child's survey of the sea-shore, does not make its own personal and imaginative response as well as depending on keen observation. This piece of writing is as 'creative' as any response to a theme such as 'Alone at Night'.

12. *STARFISH*

5, 1½ inch legs
round body in middle
6 small hearts on body with red patches
brown band and also bands of mucky white down each leg
small jagged spikes down each leg
hard coarse feeling
cream patches above the hearts
little green dots at top of one leg
legs fat at top getting thinner towards bottom
shape like ghost running through town on a dark night
real name brittle star

It is unfortunate that a view of writing which is restricted to personal expression can lead to the relative ignoring of those forms of writing that are employed within the more cognitively based curricular areas. This separation between creative writing and other forms of writing is institutionalised in some pupil record cards where there is an entry for 'creative writing'. This association of creative writing with activities like art, music or drama obviously encourages some teachers to regard creative writing, that is writing that derives from the personal and imaginative life of the child, as some kind of frill which need not be given a central place in the curriculum. This attitude has led to a decline in the practice of writing in certain schools. Less time may be devoted to writing than to other less-important language activities.

The development of the child's personal and imaginative writing is not a frill. At a purely linguistic level it is only from within a soundly based ability to communicate his awareness of things with which he is involved that the child begins to learn to abstract himself and to look at reality from points of view that are other than egocentric. Of equal importance is the child's ability to inhabit contexts which call into being writing for a variety of purposes. We do the child no service to fragment the unity of his response to experience by making premature distinctions between writing which is allegedly creative and writing which allegedly draws more upon cognitive skills.

In view of the vagueness of the term 'creative writing' and the negative attitude which many teachers seem to assume towards it there may be something to be gained by dropping the term and replacing it by the identification of the specific types of writing with which primary children have to engage.

The dropping of the term 'creative writing' is in no way a rejection of the part that writing plays in the investigation and construction of the personal and imaginative experience of the child.

IV A SENSE OF AUDIENCE

If we were to ask children why they spend so much time writing in school they might say something like, 'You can't learn if you can't write.' This misunderstanding would be encouraged by the value that, as teachers, we so often seem to attach to the written work as evidence of 'learning' and to the act of writing as an indication of a child 'working'. A more cynical (or perceptive) child might suggest that persuading him to write is only a means of exposing faults in the superficial aspects of his written language use – an x-ray of his fractured spelling, sprained syntax and malignant punctuation. This would certainly make sense of teachers' often predominantly negative and surface responses to the pupils' scripts when they mark them.

What our imaginary child would be most unlikely to talk about would be writing as an act of communication. This it self-evidently and centrally is. But communication entails an audience and this the child too seldom has. Of course he writes for his teacher, but how often does the teacher react in any sense as a real audience might? How often does she engage with the writer? Question meaning? Respond by talking about similar experiences and perceptions? Read back the piece and discuss it with the whole class? More often than not the writing will be looked at some time after it has been written. The child may often not be present. There may be little or no real feed-back. Much of the time a child must feel as if he is talking down a phone with no-one at the other end.

Of course there are genuine organisational problems to be faced here. The sheer quantity of writing that thirty children can produce may alone intimidate. If we have all our children writing at the same time and if we insist on length as an indicator of quality then the problems will be exacerbated. These problems cannot be ignored. They must be tackled. For if we do not, from the start, cultivate in the child a real sense of audience, we distort his understanding of the purposes of writing; diminish his motivation; reduce his opportunities for learning through feed-back; and, not least, deprive him of much of the pleasure that his writing could bring him.

Perhaps we have been far too unimaginative up till now. Why should the child's audience be solely or principally his teacher? The potential readership is much greater – other children in the class; older/younger children; the whole school staff; parents; children in other schools and a whole range of outside agencies. What situations occur or could be created which would encourage this development? A radical think about this and a listing of practical possibilities would be a useful whole staff exercise.

V A WRITING MODEL

Teachers do not have ready access to a model of writing that incorporates what is currently known about the nature of writing and what is involved in the act of writing. The absence of such a model makes it difficult to identify those forms of writing which children should master and makes the diagnosis of writing weakness more difficult. In the next section of this paper we attempt the construction of such a model.

7. A MODEL FOR WRITING.

A young child's view of reality will be highly personal and will be in a constant process of modification. Hopefully, as the child develops intellectually and as he gains more experience of how people and things behave his version of reality will be more open to objective proof. This movement away from the egocentric view of the world held by the young child, from a 'science' that is largely fantasy — the child's statement 'The sun is an orange' may not be a metaphor — is important in how the child makes sense of and utilises his experience. This movement must be mediated through language and we would expect that the various stages that the child moves through as he learns to abstract himself more and more from his own experience and to look at it from the outside must influence the way in which the child relates to and organises those things that he is communicating through his writing.

What could these possible stages, or stances, be?

1. One basic stance is that in which we are so involved in experience that we are unable to separate our response to it from the experience itself. We are concerned in expresssing the self. We have our intuitive, spontaneous, unconsidered responses. We do not feel the need to be explicit because we assume that other people understand what we mean, because they have shared in our experiences and value them as we do. We need not be particularly explicit as we expect that our listeners or readers will 'flesh out' our comments from their own experiences. Much of our daily communication is like that. We need only use phrases like 'That's garbage' or chant slogans like 'fascist' or 'racist'.

We use phrases that pass responsibility for comprehension on to others — "You know what I mean"; "You know the kind of thing".

Communication may become a raised eyebrow, a shrug of the shoulders, a gesture of some kind. In this kind of communication we need not aim to be accurate or explicit; we are not concerned with style. We are simply saying — "This is what happened and you know it's the kind of thing that happens."

There is little pressure on us to help our readers or listeners see what has happened through the imagination or demonstrate the truth of what has happened through the intellect.

Much of our everyday use of language is like this.

We shall call this **'centred'** language because it centres on the individual who is making the communication and not on the audience receiving it.

2. There are occasions when we wish to communicate something rather different - when we take up a rather different stance to what is being communicated. What we want to communicate is **more than the common response;** it is something we feel to be more personal. We want to communicate how we felt about things, what we noticed, what we learned about things. Because what we want to communicate is personal we cannot rely on our listener or reader being able to project his own values or experiences into ours; because we cannot rely on clichés; because we cannot rely on intonation of the voice or shrugs or facial expressions we have to find words, more exactly chosen words. This we shall call **'deep-centred'** language because while the speaker or writer is still at the centre of the experience we are concerned with something deeper than the exchange of superficially shared experience.

3. Another stance occurs as the child grows older and begins to understand that other people may have the same experiences as he does but that they may not always view or value those experiences as he does. He realises that other people have their own motivations, their own reasons, their own aims, their own values. The child begins to understand other people as beings different from himself. He may be able to inhabit the reality of other people through a kind of imaginative effort. The child may also be able to reflect on his own experiences from a viewpoint other than his own.

When a child can look at experience from the stand-point of another person or when he can see how his own experience might look to others then we can talk of his language being **'other-centred'**.

4. When a young child relates his experience he may communicate a series of particular happenings but as he develops in social experience and intellectually he may begin to see relationships between events; he may begin to detect generalities, principles. He may construct theories and hypotheses. The child is beginning to deal with events not as he experiences them but as they generally are. The child is beginning to function as the detached observer who may become the scientist, the historian, the geographer. We say that he is beginning to view experience objectively. We shall call this **'de-centred'**

language because the child no longer sees himself at the centre of all experience. Experience is something that still exists when he is not there.

Some curriculum guides on writing list large numbers of different types of writing but the surface forms of the writing – letter, notes, summary, report, personal recollection, story, etc. may be less important than the stance that a child takes to the material he wishes to communicate. The lay-out of a letter or report is far easier for a child to learn than the degree of objectivity or involvement that is expected of him. It would appear more productive to develop in the child a sense of what is expected in basic forms of writing like recalling personal experiences, telling stories, writing reports, writing from another person's viewpoint than to involve him in a variety of different forms of writing the purposes of which are not clear. The effectiveness of a piece of writing will depend on how the child relates to the experience or situation being investigated or communicated and not on his slavishly following certain ways of setting the material down.

Examples:

13. *I like being a girl because when your mums freinds in girls are aloud in because we are nice and tidy and the boys are all scruffy and dirty there not aloud in to get a cup of tea and biscuits. When your a girl you can go out pony riding lessons, but most boy's don't like pony's. We can still run as fast and go our bikes fast, boys are not all that as good as girls.*

Behind this rather breathless piece we can hear the girl's voice. She is not concerned with selection, organisation or correctness. It has the flow of a piece of writing that has not been laboured over and was produced in a very short time. There is no attempt to look behind the incidents recalled to find any kind of generalisation. The clear link between the girl's own natural expression and this writing without concern for organisation or style would make this a piece of **centred** writing.

14. *It was in the hospital the second day after the crash I was just beginning to ask questions about the crash. On Friday night it was in my mind to ask how my sister and her baby were but I forgot it until after the visiting hour. I did not sleep on Friday night for fear my sister and baby were dead. I lay worried most of Saturday. When visiting came I asked my mother and she told me my sister and her baby were alive but badly injured and my sister was still unconscious and the baby was in an oxygen tent, with a broken leg. My sister's injuries were two broken legs and facial injuries. In a way I was sad and at the same time happy.*

This is a boy writing on an actual happening. He had told the teacher that he did not wish to write on the theme of "Accident" but at the end of the day offered this piece. It is not a piece of 'fine writing' heavy with sensory recall and affective response but the act of writing has come between the incident and the recall in a way that has not happened in the previous piece. The organisation is, as is common, narrative but there is a sense of control and selection that makes this seemingly simple piece an example of honest and thoughtful recall. The boy is not so much interested in re-telling the events as in conveying what they meant to him. This is an example of **deep-centred** writing.

15. *Sitting high in the largest tree in the wood I can see for miles around. Surrounding me is a sea of green, gently swaying in the wind. Sometimes you may see a small bird, rise and then fly away.*

At the edge of the wood stands a small stone croft, with two small windows looking out over a ploughed field, guarded by a scare crow dressed in a floppy hat and a ragged coat. Bordering the field is a stone wall with a deer close by munching grass.

Far, far away I can see the rugged outline of a huge grey mountain, towering high, trying to reach a blue, cloudless sky.

And beyond that .....

That I cannot see.

This piece of writing is not recall. It originated in the girl's reading of an extract from a novel. The piece is an amalgam of the girl's own experience and her experience of fiction and poetry. We notice the evocative nature of this piece with its own still tone; the seeming reality of what is not a 'real' incident; the style; the total and effortless control of the various skills of writing. This is not writing fuelled by excitement, interest or distress; this is writing for the sake of writing. The girl is writing for

herself but she must surely have had in mind a generalised audience just as an author has. This piece takes **deep-centred** writing to its limit where the form and expression are as important, if not more important, than the content.

16. *She sits in the same pew every Sunday as usual with that same tired look on her face. Her wrinkled old lips move slowly as she sings the hymns. Her few strands of completely white hair are tied in a bug. The skin on her face is wrinkled and tight and one tooth is black and decayed. As always she falls asleep in the middle of the ministers sermon and if you listen you can hear the queer funny snoring noises she always makes. When you look at her she seems to have a lonely look on her face. Then as she gets up, very unstable on her feet, you see her hobble out and down the same old road.*

This is a very sensitive piece of description by a boy. He is describing an actual person but the description shades into the demonstration of his realisation of what it is to be that person. This is done with great restraint – note the repetition of 'same' and the use of 'as usual' and 'as always' in tracing the same routine. This sensitivity towards the inner reality of this old woman makes this a piece of **other-centred** writing.

17. *One day Mrs. Reid was in the kitchen drying the dishes. When all of a sudden the door bell rang. It was a man from the burgh he said that she would have to flit to a new home. Well this news was very happy news to her then comes the the trouble of leaving her old house because she lived in that house all her live. Later that day she decided she would flit to the new house. So she phoned up the burgh and told him she would take the house she packed her case and took some photographs with her to let her see some of her grandchildren. Then she got to her new house she settled in and thought the house was very comfortable than the old one. She was very happy. And got a lot of new furniture she died when she was 99 years old of lonelyness and a lot of folks did not visit her.*

This is a more conventional attempt at **other-centred** writing. Although the girl writing this has an awareness of the superficial details of the old woman's life she has not that understanding of it demonstrated in the previous piece. In fact most of what this girl writes came from the pre-writing discussion.

Although imagination feeds on knowledge it is clear that knowledge alone is not enough; there must be sympathetic inhabiting of the other reality. Because this girl cannot really comprehend how this old woman felt she is forced to say what happened to her. This involves her in a narrative and the effort of maintaining the narrative takes over with a consequent slackening of control. The girl reverts to speech forms and there is less selection of significant detail. This girl is not yet ready to move from talking about herself to viewing life from someone else's stand-point.

18. *One Afternoon the Teacher showed us a model engine working. Douglas, Steven, Jim and I decided to make one. After looking through some books we decided in making our own. Douglas and Steven made a turbine out of plasticine and a felt tip top. Jim and I used polystirene and pen nibs. We got the teacher's gas stove, put some water in a tin and made a small hole in it. Then we slammed the lid on firmly. I tried steven's first. It went like a bomb. Next we tried mine it never worked. I decided to make another one. We got a cork and some pieces of metal, took away the inside of the cork and put a felt tip pen nib inside the cork. When we tried it we found it was too heavy and did not work.*

This is a boy writing a report on a science experiment. The experiment was eventually successful and the boy and his companions were able to give a clear presentation of the experiment to the class and to deal competently with questions. The written report is not so effective. It is clear and precise but some things are missing from it and the reader may not understand exactly what went on. The boy writes in the first person; this would not be acceptable within a science report at a later stage but the primary child tends to personalise experience. He has to take it into himself. We accept this as it would be improper to expect a child to maintain an objective stance before he was ready for it. Any demand that the child change the language of the report to meet more adult expectations would probably lead to a deterioration in its effectiveness. There are some vocabulary items that are not 'scientific'; if

we object to them it should be on the basis of their imprecision. The main weakness is that the child does not quite appreciate what his readers need to be told. He organises the report in the familiar narrative sequence but he does not go into sufficient detail about how the various items were actually constructed and how they performed. With a boy of this ability it should not be difficult to discuss such things with him and subsequent drafts would probably demonstrate a greater awareness of what his reader needed to know. In particular the teacher might discuss with this group of boys an alternative structure that moves away from narrative and which focusses on such things as what they aimed to do; why they selected this particular method; what happened; what they learned from the experiment. The boys were able to handle such topics during discussion sessions but they are not yet familiar with the written forms that could handle such knowledge. However, if children are not ready to move away from a narrative sequence into more logically ordered structures then we have to accept a clear, well-ordered narrative with the minimum of personalised response. This is not yet **de-centred** language but it may be as close to it as many primary children will come.

(Some readers may be aware of a correspondence between the stances described here and the expressive, poetic and transactional uses of language described by James Britton.)

8. THE POSSIBILITY OF SEQUENTIAL DEVELOPMENT IN WRITING.

Our experience of how children use language in the classroom might suggest that these different stances – **centred, deep-centred, other-centred** and **de-centred** – have to wait on social experience or intellectual development before they appear. This could give us a crude model of language development but if we are to create a more valid and useful model of the stages in writing through which children travel then we have to look at a number of factors.

What do we need to create an acceptable model?

A WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF WRITING THAT CHILDREN MAY BE REQUIRED TO USE?

Children use writing to communicate and investigate various aspects of their experience – but what is the nature of the things that we experience?

We may experience things that we are actually involved in.

We may experience things through the imagination.

We may observe experience in which we are not actually involved.

This would seem to give us three main uses of language:

Language which is used to **RECALL** experience.

Language which is used to **IMAGINE** experience.

Language which is used to **OBSERVE** experience.

In writing this would give **Report Writing;**
Stories;
Record Writing.

It is important to remember that these types of writing seldom exist as pure forms, particularly with primary children. Most children's writing will contain elements of the personal. We tend, however, to underestimate the intellectual abilities of young children and may not expect them to use writing that is not essentially personal. While primary children will not have an adult understanding of the function of writing even children in infant classes will produce a variety of writing if the context calls these into being.

B IS THERE ANY DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THESE THREE FORMS OF WRITING?

Any development within these forms of writing cannot be in terms of language alone. It has to reflect the child's personal and social development. Because of the close relationship between language and intelligence it would appear helpful if our model followed the line of the child's cognitive development. Most authorities on children's cognitive development see the child moving from a centred to a de-centred position. The young child relates to experience in an egocentric way but normally learns increasingly to abstract himself from experience. To a greater or lesser degree he will begin to generalise, draw inferences, come to conclusions, construct hypotheses. One of the main functions of the primary school is to assist in this process. We aim not to give the child facts but to help him become an autonomous thinker and to use language to help him organise and make sense of his experience in an increasingly abstracted way. Margaret Donaldson in 'Children's Minds' speaks of the 'disembeddedness' of language, language that is not embedded in activities or a context. This disembedded language is peculiarly the language of school and if a child does not learn to use language in this way then there will be little success for him within school or within many aspects of adult life. This form of language should not be seen as possessed exclusively by older children. Even infants will demonstrate the ability to speculate and to solve problems and will use the appropriate language. Perhaps there is a tendency in primary education to limit the intellectual demands we make on young children.

It has been common in discussing language to think of cognitive ability demonstrated through objective uses of language and to see other forms of language as characterised by sensory evidence or affective response. This is not so. When a child talks or writes about personal experience or when he reflects on the experience of others he will move through increasingly higher levels of abstraction just as he would do in writing science reports. The following table demonstrates the various levels of abstraction involved in reporting, story-telling and recording. In all of these forms of language the child moves further away from the egocentric stance as he matures and gains experience. Any act of writing involves the child's intellectual processes.

	RECALL	STORY	RECORD
	inhabited experience	*imagined experience*	*observed experience*
This is what I did, made up or watched.	naming of events	naming of events	naming of events
	events in a connected sequence	events in a connected sequence	events in a connected sequence
This is what I noticed or felt.	awarenesses and responses	'real' data in imagined story	data observed; (response controlled)
This is why it happened and what I can learn from it.	significance or value child sees in events	understanding of the reality of other people	explanation of events or deductions from them
This sums up what I learned or deduced from the events	understandings child has about his own behaviour	understandings child has about the motives behind other people's behaviour	summing-up of what observed/learned; principles or generalisations to be abstracted
This is what will or could happen	child's anticipation as to how he will behave in the future	child's expectations as to how other people might behave	application of these generalisations in another context; construction of hypotheses
	style	style	appropriate form
	all through this development the child will have been concerned, to a greater or lesser extent, with 'how' his awareness of these real or imagined events is communicated to his readers.		increasingly the child will realise that his readers will expect data and conclusions to be presented in a particular way.

Although we may chart the child's movement from a centred to a de-centred stance we should not seek to force what he writes into a tidy sequence. Earlier forms will exist alongside later ones: a particular situation may call a particular response into being: competent writers will move from being participants to spectators and back again; children may deliberately choose to write in a more personal, less objective, form because it suits what they wish to do.

Examples of abstraction:

19. *I had a ride in a boat*
I was in the water
I like the ice-cream
I was in a train

This is a child **reporting** on an actual experience. It is at a very low level of abstraction. The child simply names events like a series of captions to pictures. We appreciate that he must have been at the seaside but there is no statement of theme, the child simply selecting a number of incidents as they occur to him. The child has not yet reached the stage of being able to place the events in any time sequence.

20. ... *I shouted out to my dad but he couldn't hear me for all those kids screaming and shouting. So I didn't bother. It kept going round and round like a rocket. My hair was going everywhere and my*

skirt was going up in the air but I was afraid to let go and hold it down. Everytime the wheel went round my stomach felt as if it was in a washing machine with it rolling round and round. All I could hear was children screaming with fun and laughter. I had put on soft shoes in case my feet got sore with walking about but they were aching with pressing so hard ...

Here is a girl **reporting** on a visit to a carnival. There is a significant difference between this and the previous example. We are aware of the child's selection of significant items to convey her awareness of the experience and of her ability to handle narrative sequence. The girl does more than merely list events that took place; she is able to communicate to us her feelings and emotions. Interestingly, the child is able to 'step out' of the story to explain what was going on. This ability to be within a story and to comment on it is an example of the child's functioning at a reasonably high level of abstraction.

21. ... *Bobby always looked at me as if to say wait till I get you and she often did which didn't make me like her any better. But one day I plucked up courage and went to her house her mother asked me in but when I went in there was no seats or tables instead there was foam and thats where they sat after that I could not tell her mother because she had a belt and I new she must have hit them with ...*

This is part of a child's **report** on a visit to a neighbour's house. It would be easy to dismiss this as a not very well written account of a commonplace incident. However, in this extract, and throughout the whole piece, the writer shows that she has developed in self-awareness and in her awareness of others. She realises the significance of various items in Bobby's house and is able to explain the motives for her own behaviour and change in attitude. Here is a child who has abstracted herself from the simple retelling of events that have taken place and is now able to discuss the significance of these.

22. *In this putcher ther is a block of flat's a high chimny and a work a teaphone pole and an old block of high houses a dump with wood a piece of metal ...*

This piece of writing continues like this for several more lines. The child is unable to make any selection from amongst the things he is observing. He can impose no order on his **recording** of the items; he cannot make any comment on them. The child's inability to select, order and discuss demonstrates an inability to abstract himself from the act of observation sufficiently to consider the audience for whom he is writing.

23. *There is an old building which isn't getting used. It has got a tall chimney and there are high flats behind the building. There is a factory of some sort and another old building behind the flats. It has bits of rubbish here and there and dirt to. There probably was a building at one time with lots of bits of wood and an old rubbish bin probably that is where the bins used to be ... There is a road behind the factory but I don't think that many vehicles go about because there is nothing there but old buildings ... I think they should build a couple of shops there instead of houses or anything else. The factory must be shut for good.*

This girl does rather more than give a randomly selected list. She attempts to **record** in a more organised way, grouping items together. She also tries to speculate about things that cannot be taken directly from the picture. The child is abstracting herself more and more intellectually and imaginatively from a simple listing of what she sees before her.

24. *The Dogfish is long slim like a thin window pane. Its head is rubbery, sloppy, grey. The mouth is like the gills of a fish. It is oval. It makes me feel it is going to eat me. Its deadness makes me feel scared. It is shouting at me that it is dead. Fins all wobbly and flickering, bending. Beside its fins it has got spikes. It has breathing holes at the side of its body. The holes make me feel I am going to be sucked into the deadness, feeling it wobble.*

This is a child recording her impressions of a dead dogfish. Here the movement away from the mere itemising of details takes a different form. The child uses the resources of language, including simile, to convey to her audience a most vivid picture of this dead creature. She also shares with us her response to this creature that even in death has the potential to terrify. It is the child's ability to perceive and respond that creates this piece – not some generalised language skill. The experience calls the passive language into action. The impressionistic style derives from the task and not from any lack of skill. Although this girl is at the centre of the piece we are aware that she is doing more than recording her impressions – she is making them available to an audience that has not shared in the initial experience but which can share in this written communication through her concern for language that is as explicit as it is powerful.

25. *One day I was on the cost trane it was creepey dracula came out and but me in the neck I was frightened and was in my bed.*

This child is telling us a story. It obviously derives from comic books or television. She simply names a few events. There is no attempt to create atmosphere, characterisation or emotion. The reader will have to supply these things. This represents a very simple level of story telling where the mere naming of events is sufficient to elicit the appropriate response from readers who know what is expected of them when they read a horror story.

26. *Once upon a time there was a boy called Harry. Harry was a very tired and lazy boy. He was very tired and lazy because he couldn't sleep. Harry lived in a little country village called Linton. He lived with his Mum and Dad. Every night Harry went to bed he never slept a wink. His mother gave him sleeping pills but still he couldn't sleep.*

One cold, windy night at midnight Harry was lying in his bed when a lovely lady in a white gown appeared by his bed. Harry was startled and nearly jumped out of his skin. The lady said to him, "Do not be scared Harry. I want to help you. The only way you will ever be able to sleep is if you go up the mountain of the giant and bring back the giant's head." So that night Harry crept out of his bed to start the long journey to the mountain.

It took him ten days to get there and when he arrived he was very cold and hungry. He spotted the cave in which the giant lived. He got his sword ready and in he went. The giant was sitting eating a wild bear. Harry thought it was the most horrible thing he had ever seen. It had one great big eye in the middle of its head and big black dirty teeth. Harry crept up behind the giant up onto his shoulder and with a hard blow cut off its head. He was very pleased with himself.

He went home and told his mother about his journey. That night when he went to bed he put the giant's head on the table. Then, as soon as Harry's head touched the pillow he fell asleep.

When he woke up the head had gone.

This story is effective not just because of its originality nor because of the powerful central idea. It makes its effect because we respond to the 'texture' of the story. The story is placed in a setting and peopled with characters who have the feel of life about them. The supernatural characters are sketched in with effective economy. It is effective because of the marriage of the real and the imagined. It is effective because the girl writing it can move from events to commentary on the events. It is effective because the girl has the skill to select only significant items. There is no surface coherence between these events. They are linked by an underlying coherence. The less able child cannot abstract himself enough from the story to fill out setting or character or to provide motivation we accept as credible even in a supernatural tale. The less able child could not select the significant but would have to tell all. The less able child could not move from relating events to creating a story that demands a response from its audience. We may talk of this child's imagination but when we talk of the precision, the selection, the organisation, the projection of reality, the movement from participant to spectator role we are talking of intellectual processes. This girl might not enjoy science as much as she enjoys telling stories but it would be hard to believe that she could not provide a precise and well-organised report on a scientific investigation if asked to do so.

The identification of these three forms of writing and the establishment of a sequential development within them is helpful in assessing children's writing and in the construction of a school's language programme or in classroom work. It comprehends even the most abstract forms of language work met with in the primary school and reminds us that writing is not simply a 'frill' but plays a central part

in the child's personal and social development and is of fundamental value in the encouragement of the child's intellectual development as well as his emotional growth.

This sequential development within these three forms of writing is still not sufficient to give us an effective evaluation procedure. To these we have to add information derived from our examination of how writing differs from spoken language.

C HOW DOES WRITING DIFFER FROM SPEECH?

On page 12 we looked at differences between speech and writing. If we re-examine some of the characteristics of writing we may see their significance for the child when he writes.

1. writing does not take place in a context; it is abstracted/disembedded. There can be no reference to immediate situation; the child cannot point to anything; he has to communicate through words.
2. the writer cannot use para-linguistic communication like gesture, intonation, pace, to communicate meaning, particularly emotion.
3. there can be no immediate feed-back from the reader. The child does not know if what he is writing is important to or understandable by his reader.
4. writing is uninterrupted or sustained communication. There will be no interruptions from a speaker, no encouraging remarks to help the writer keep going. The asides and digressions of speech are not acceptable in writing.
5. readers have certain expectations about what they will meet in writing; we expect that a story, a scientific report will have their appropriate form and appropriate content.
6. readers expect that a writer will set about writing in a way that is appropriate to writing.

If we put these items together we get the reader's expectations about writing.

**READERS EXPECT THAT WRITING WILL BE EXPLICIT,
ORDERED,
COHERENT,
CORRECT**

When we combine the three types of writing with the characteristics of writing we now have five criteria for evaluation.

a. **SELECTION** — what the child chooses to write about and how he sees his audience;

b. **EXPLICITNESS** — which has much to do with the child's selection of words through which to communicate what he has selected to write about;

c. **COHERENCE** — which has to do with how the various items in the child's writing relate to the central theme and how the child shows the relationship between items at a sentence level;

d. **STRUCTURE** — which has to do with the overall shape that the child chooses to impose on his communication;

e. **CONVENTIONS** — which has to do with such things as spelling and punctuation.

If we now incorporate the sequential development discussed above with these five categories, we begin to get an evaluation scheme which enables us to diagnose weaknesses in children's writing with some accuracy.

SELECTION

We have three scales here — **report writing;**
— **story writing;**
— **record writing.**

Again we have to remind readers that writing does not always fall neatly into these three types. Most writing from primary children will contain significant elements of the personal. The various stages

described below exist but their emergence is not always clear cut; earlier stages persist and children may deliberately return to an earlier stage because it suits the purpose of their writing. It is not suggested that this particular grid be applied to each piece of writing that a child produces. Its use at regular intervals might indicate a child's development. The important thing is that a teacher should internalise the sequence described below so that her evaluation of a child's writing may be made more explicit and that she should judge by things other than formal correctness.

Report: Stages

a. child simply names events; little selection or cohesion; mixture of banal/important;

b. 'slice of life' – child simply takes reader through a chronological sequence listing all events that happened; importance given to the 'punctuation marks of the day' – getting up, meals, bed-time, etc.;

c. child tries to convey quality of the experience – what he noticed and felt;

d. child attempts to indicate the significance of the events for him – he uses hind-sight; shows awareness of self and of other people; moves in and out of the action as he moves from participant role to author role;

e. child identifies permanent elements in his experiences – how he tends to behave in certain circumstances; character traits; how people tend to behave; child is able to anticipate how he might behave in future and, as yet, unexperienced events.

Story: Stages

a. child simply names the events he has imagined; rudimentary time sequence;

b. events in chronological sequence; events frequently sensational or derivative;

c. child injects into the imagined story more awareness of characters and setting;

d. characters not only more real but child describes human motives, responses; as much concerned with how people behave as with the sheer action;

e. if child is writing fantasy it is rooted in real life and shows an inner consistency; although characters and events are purely fictitious characters have the same consistency as real characters; if the child is writing imaginatively about other people he shows some understanding of how and why other people behave.

Record: Stages

a. child simply names what he has observed;

b. child begins to be more specific about what he has observed e.g. colour, shape, size, movement, characteristics, etc.;

c. child shows relationship between events – not just in time and space but how one event affects or influences another;

d. the child seeks for an explanation as to why events take place – explanation may be result of observation but increasingly will involve deduction;

e. child attempts to extract some general principle from what he has observed; he may simply sum up what he has noticed or he may attempt to formulate some theory to explain events;

f. child tries to apply these generalisations to a new situation – by trying to find practical applications or using theory to explain another set of events or to solve a problem.

EXPLICITNESS

a. the child uses a literal vocabulary, considerable dependence on nouns; uses linking verbs – to be/to have – a great deal; also common verbs like, say, walk, etc.; very few adjectives or adverbs and limited use of words like 'very', 'too', 'much', etc., considerable use of "I" and "we";

b. increased use of adjectives and adverbs and use of adverbs to modify these; more use of words that "place" events in setting;

c. more words indicating responses, feelings; increased use of phrases;

d. increased use of abstract nouns; use of metaphorical language;

e. use of wide vocabulary appropriate to theme.

COHERENCE

a. no very clear relationship between items; simple sentence predominates;

b. simple sentences giving way to co-ordination; items joined by loose chronology; considerable use of 'and then', still confusion over time;

c. co-ordination moving into subordination; the exact development of various subordinate clauses is difficult to chart but the following is a rough guide; time clauses – particularly to do with chronological sequence – appear early as do time phrases;

place clauses – particularly 'where' – and place phrases;

noun clauses objective – 'he noticed that ...'; 'he said that ...';

some clauses showing causal relationship – if/because; child will still frequently use 'and' when should be using 'because' (difficulty in spelling?); if/because may be used almost as stock phrases without real understanding;

d. clauses which show adversative function – e.g. 'although' clauses;
clauses of manner – 'as';
adjective clauses are difficult to place; perhaps used more widely used by children who are readers;

statements suggesting possibility or tentativeness – built round verbs like might/should; loss of redundancy, phrases and single words may carry meaning instead of clauses.

STRUCTURE

a. cluster of items with loose connection between them;

b. rudimentary time sequence;

c. sequential narrative;

d. selective narrative – child does not tell everything he has experienced; he only tells the most significant things; this may mean that the relationship between these items is not explicit;

increased tendency to start near to significant event or to actually start in the middle of the action; some movement backwards and forwards in time as child increasingly comments on the events being communicated;

e. child has developed a repertoire of structures to communicate a variety of events.

CONVENTIONS

It is difficult to place these on one scale and they are usually easy to identify; child may be placed on a five-point scale with reference to frequency of formal errors.

These various criteria may now be used for evaluation or diagnosis. Again we must emphasise that the emergence of various items in children's writing does not follow an absolutely predetermined sequence but the thrust is there and such criteria enable comparisons to be made between different children or different stages in a child's work with a little more objectivity than that obtained from impression marking. These criteria also allow information to be exchanged between teachers.

THE APPLICATION OF THESE CRITERIA

27. *I like being a girl, because when you mums freinds in girls are aloud in because we are nice and tidy and the boys are all scruffy and dirty there not aloud in to get a cup of tea and biscuits. When your a girl you can go out pony riding lessons, but most boys don't like pony's. We can still run as fast and go bikes fast, boys are not all that as good as girls.*

We can now look at this piece of writing again. It is a lively piece of writing and the child has attempted to deal with the theme in general terms but she cannot operate at that level. She is arguing

more from particularities and some of them irrelevant at that. She is operating at stage (b) under 'Explicitness'. Under 'Coherence' the child is comfortably within the (c) stage using subordinate clauses quite freely – time and reason; also comparison and use of 'but'. Notice the interesting use of present infinitive 'there not aloud in to get a cup of tea and biscuits'. For this kind of theme the child needs a more logical 'Structure' – one that would allow data to be grouped. She does attempt a conclusion but it hardly arises from the argument. Unable to use the familiar time sequence here, the child is really operating at a low level of 'structure' – stage (a) – "cluster of items with loose connection between them" but this probably indicates a regression on her part arising from her inability to handle a generalised statement.

This is rather a slapdash effort and one wonders how many of the errors committed under 'Conventions' would disappear with careful proof-reading.

What this child needs is not so much work in language as help in setting about constructing an argument and differentiating between subjective and objective proof.

28. *I was in Blackpool two days it was a lovely day when I woke up. I got my breckfast and me and mum and dad went out we got a tram to the pier and and got a drink I was on the big chute Then we left and went to the Plesure Beach. The first thing I was on was the Big Dipper. My mum was sick. Then I was on the bumper car I was hitting every body. Then I was on the log I got soaked. Then I tried to get on a horse it was not easy. It was time to go home so I went on one more thing that was the Grand National. After that we went home it was were warm so I had ice cream.*

This is a boy reporting on a holiday visit. It would be wrong to see this boy as needing exercises designed to improve correctness. This boy has little idea of what is involved in trying to communicate his experience to someone else. If we were to place him under 'Selection: report' he would be placed in stage (a). He simply names events in a loose time sequence. What he chooses to tell us is of little interest to others. Like many school children he talks about food and spending money. He cannot communicate the quality of this experience. Again under 'Explicitness' this writing is dominated by use of nouns. Look how many of the verbs have little meaning content. As far as 'Coherence', is concerned the boy would be moving from stage (a) to stage (b). His writing is dominated by co-ordination and a simple time sequence. The structure is the 'punctuation marks of the day' type – starting at breakfast and moving through to going home at night. Under 'Structure' this boy would be at stage (b). As far as 'Conventions' are concerned the child is quite correct in spelling but weak in sentence organisation.

This boy is in a senior class. He will have been writing like this since he came into primary school and will keep on writing like this until he passes out of secondary. Knowing how to set about writing is not something that comes with maturation – it has to be taught. The child needs far more discussion of where he might find interesting things to write about from his own experience; he needs to be encouraged to start with rough notes, jottings and impressions and from these to sift out ideas; he needs to be trained in how to draft his work; he could do with being kept away from narrative and encouraged to look closely at limited experience. We either want a boy like this to write well or we don't. If we do we have to begin with the fact that he is now eleven years old and has still not got any idea as to what writing is about.

The importance of having some scheme for evaluation and diagnosis is that it draws our attention to those places where weakness lies. Once a teacher has worked with such a scheme for a few days she begins to internalize it and it begins to alert her to things she might be doing within her language programme. It would not be practical to apply such a grid to every piece of writing.

9. BACK TO BASICS?

This approach to evaluation was used with some thirty classes drawn from 10 different schools. One rather unexpected finding was the importance of record writing. A significant number of children did better on this activity than on any other. Interestingly children did not confine themselves to giving an objective account of what they had observed. They gave their response to what was being recorded and speculated more freely than they did in other forms of writing. Generally speaking performance in record writing was better than in report writing. One reason may be that perception is at a lower level than memorising and children may have found the task easier. Importantly they had something before them, an event, a situation, to which they could relate. They also had an awareness of audience that is not always available to a child. The purpose of the writing task was clearer: children had to communicate their awareness of a city scene to readers who had not actually seen it. These seemed to encourage response and speculation at a higher level than that found when children tried to report on experience. It could be that more attention should be paid in writing to children recording actual experiences for an actual audience. It may be that this is a more effective way into writing than depending on personal recall.

Teachers may argue that we should return to the basics – by that is usually meant punctuation and spelling. Using the assessment procedures outlined above it was demonstrated that the population of school-children tested tended to do least well in the categories Selection; Explicitness; Coherence.

These are the areas concerned with what a child chooses to write about and how he communicates with his audience. Older children did no better than younger children which would seem to indicate that this is not a skill which the children acquired through maturation. It has to be taught. Some children do know how to set about writing but it is likely that these are children who come from homes where children are introduced to literacy and where parents and children have an interest in reading and writing. The investigation being carried out at Bristol University into the language of children moving from home into school indicates that the most significant factor contributing to a child's attaining a high level score on various language tests at the age of seven was familiarity with more abstract and less context bound uses of language, namely with reading and writing, and this was associated with the place and value of literacy in the everyday life of the parents. Where children do not have this familiarity they are at a disadvantage in school because they lack skills important for school learning and this in turn affects the way teachers interact with them.

If children at the age of 11 still have little idea as to the purpose and function of writing, if they cannot communicate with a non-present audience then why is this so? Are teachers not teaching these things? It may be that some teachers still have an unproductive and obsessive preoccupation with formal skills and with decontextualised language exercises. It is more likely that many will assume that children know what is involved in the use of language and what school has to do is to encourage correctness and extend the range of modes of language used.

The results of this survey of writing within ten schools would appear to indicate that this is not where weakness lies. Children produced uninvolved and unacceptable pieces of writing because they are not motivated to write and because they do not understand what is expected of them in writing. If the teacher regards this as inevitable and a symptom of the poor language functioning of the child then the teacher's expectations may drop and she may accept this level of writing performance as the norm.

An assessment procedure like the one outlined encourages us to look at where children are actually weakest or strongest.

The basics in writing are not spelling or punctuation; they are much more basic than these. They are – where do I find the material for my writing?; what do people expect of me when I write?; how do I communicate with a non-present audience?

Badly spelled and badly-punctuated trivia remain trivia even when spelling and punctuation have been improved.

10. THINGS TO DO.

A. STARTING WRITING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

We have to ensure that from the time a child starts to write attention is paid to the areas of weakness discussed above. Most children learn to write by dictating their own message to the teacher and copying words, frequently as captions to pictures. There are, as we have indicated, significant differences between speech and writing, and the speech strategies that a child learns within the home environment may not assist him to overcome the problems posed by writing; early writing should begin to teach the child how to communicate with a non-present audience and how to develop explicitness and coherence.

While early writing may rely on the child attempting to write what he has discussed in speech, a useful starting point may be found in drawing which shares some communication characteristics with writing – it is permanent, can communicate across distances and is capable of modification in the light of feedback. In addition children are usually well-disposed towards drawing. We are not suggesting the common activity of children adding a caption to a drawing but the teacher using the child's drawing as a communicative act and helping the child develop some awareness of what is involved in communicating with an audience who cannot give immediate feedback.

1. EXPLICITNESS

The teacher may choose to discuss with the children a simple activity which occurs in a variety of real-life situations, e.g. stretching up high, jumping, lifting a heavy load, etc. The teacher discusses where children might use this. If the action is stretching up children may suggest getting something off a shelf, putting out a light, stretching to climb a tree, etc. The children are asked to draw the activity they have chosen; it is likely that this drawing will lack significant detail and not be set in a context. It is unlikely that the child will incorporate in his drawing details of, say, the room in which it took place or items he may have used to help him. The teacher 'reads' the drawing and discusses it with the child. Discussion should centre on making the action and context more explicit and on any difficulties the teacher may have in understanding the drawing. "Did this take place in a room in your house?" "Which room was it?" "How would anyone looking at your picture know this?" "I don't know what you're standing on. Is it a carpet or the bare floor?" "Did you use anything to help you?" ... and so on. The child now shares in the assumptions that the teacher has about what might have been communicated and shares in the difficulty that one member of his audience has in reading his drawing. This discussion and modification of the child's drawing can be part of a series of activities designed to encourage explicitness, e.g. child reporting on activities in speech, discussing pictures, reading stories and poems which may act as models and participating in language activities designed to strengthen certain vocabulary uses, e.g. sensory awareness, relationships, etc.

The purpose of these activities is to develop in the child the ability to communicate with a degree of explicitness and with increasing understanding of what his audience may be interested in knowing. It is important that the child (and, ideally, also his parents) should see these as serious activities in which the teacher is interested and not as mere time fillers.

2. COMMUNICATION WITH A DISTANT AUDIENCE

Most children will be aware of friends and relations with whom their family keep in touch. The problem is how?

Children may suggest various possibilities.

writing – children may dictate messages to the teacher
telephone – telephones may be used in the classroom
tape-recording – use of a cassette recorder to tape spoken messages
pictures – the children's own drawings

Whatever method is used children should be involved in the following considerations:

What are the important things I want to say and what will the distant audience want to hear?

If the person at the other end cannot ask me questions will he understand what I am writing, saying, drawing?

An interesting point that may arise is that a drawing alone may not be an adequate means of communication. Writing will have to be used. If captions are provided they should not communicate what is evident in the drawing. A drawing of a child working at a sink may be captioned 'Jim washing the dishes'. It is possible that what the child wants to say could be, 'Jim being a big boy and helping Mummy'. This cannot be conveyed by the drawing alone.

At all stages children should be encouraged to read, listen to or to look at the various pieces of writing produced within their group and to make suggestions and to offer criticisms. Every effort should be made to enter into actual communication with other people within their own class, within the school, outside the school. A class message board allows children to write notes to each other and to their teacher. Teachers and children can enter into written dialogue about class matters. Again, children can explain problems and difficulties they face. Or they could write their own school reports to complement their teachers'. They can write to absent children or children who have moved to another area. They could be 'twinned' with a class in another school with all the writing possibilities that suggests. They can write instructions for the use of the tape recorder or the maintenance of the class guinea pig. They can make lists – what do we need for baking tomorrow?; what do we need to take on the class outing? They can invent games related to project work and write rules and instructions. They can be involved in setting up displays – writing labels, headings, explanations. They can compose their own maths problems. Opportunities abound for them to write to their own or other children's parents. Older children may write stories for younger children. Project books may be written up during and at the end of a piece of work – not simply as a record of what has been learned but also as a resource or possible starting point for another class working on a similar topic. Letters can be written to outside agencies asking for information or requesting help with problems encountered. School newspapers and class news sheets can be produced. And so on.

These are only a few of very many possibilities. Teachers should be continually alert to the countless opportunities that exist. Writing, then, must be seen as a normal, necessary and purposeful activity – an integral part of the ongoing life of the class – and not as something done only within the isolated framework of a lesson.

3. *PUTTING THINGS IN A SEQUENCE*

A drawing captures a 'frozen moment'. The reports or stories told or written by a child have to deal with movement in time. In addition to such reports or stories taking into account what people need to know and being in sufficient detail the child will need to tell things in an understandable sequence and with a degree of coherence between the various items.

Using various starting points children may be encouraged to make up individual or group stories. These are then worked on until the children are satisfied with the versions arrived at. The finished stories may be made available to others through books produced by the children and the opinions and comments of those others should be sought.

The making of stories may be supported by various activities that encourage the development of reports or stories that go beyond the single items found in captions.

drawing – children may collectively produce a large frieze that forms the background to a story or a known situation. As the story or report develops cut-out figures or objects are added to the frieze or removed. This not only encourages discussion in a way that demonstrates the relationship between items, it also becomes a record of the discussion which may be subsequently written down in book form.

pictures – children may discuss what is going on in a picture. Discussion of what they think took place before and after the incident in the picture creates a story based on beginning, middle and end and helps strengthen their ability to control sequence.

characters – children are frequently more inventive when making up stories round established characters. These may be cut-outs made by the children, photographs, or well-known characters from stories or television. These characters may be placed in various situtations suggested by the children and stories made round them. These stories may be recorded in book form.

books – these provide ideas for stories but may be used in other ways. The teacher may ask children to suggest endings to stories being read. Where picture books have a clear sequence of pictures children may be asked to provide a story-line. In all cases the children's stories are recorded in book form, made available to others and compared with the book version.

All such activities should be supported by providing as wide a range of books as possible. Where children do not read, recorded versions of stories may be made available on cassettes or children may be read to. This takes time but some infant rooms welcome parents or older pupils as readers. Such an activity is often helpful to an older pupil who is a poor reader. He will be less embarrassed reading simple material to young children than reading within his own class. The necessity to read to young children and answer their questions may motivate his preparation of the material and improve his self-confidence in reading.

Throughout the early writing stage children will be asked to report their experiences and make up stories. These are recorded in various ways and modified or criticised before becoming permanent versions. Children will have heard a large number of stories and will have seen their teacher writing down stories, talking informally about language as she does so. The children will have copied down words appearing within their environment and will have 'written' to various people in school and out. They will have been encouraged to think about what people want to hear and will have been encouraged to think about explicitness and order. With this awareness of writing behind them, children should be more ready to move into independent writing.

4. *TALKING ABOUT LANGUAGE*

Investigation of early reading indicates that many children do not understand what is meant by words like 'word', 'sentence', 'letter' and many others. A child may learn to read and write without being able to define such terms but serious misconceptions may occur.

29. *One day I went to Largs.*
with my Mummy and Daddy.
and I went on the shows.
and it was good I had.
ice-cream and crisps and ginger.
and my wee sister had ice-cream too.
The car broke down on the way.
back the man from the A.A.
fixed it for us.

The peculiar sentence punctuation of this boy can be understood if we appreciate that he is placing a period at the end of each line. The child is obviously confusing 'line' with 'sentence'. This may have arisen from the boy writing down a series of caption-like statements one after the other, as many children do, to form a continuous story. This boy had been doing this for some time and had not picked up from his reading an understanding of how sentence punctuation operated. There was no evidence to suggest that the teacher had dealt with this error as arising from a confusion between 'line' and 'sentence'.

The teacher's writing down of what children dictate is a useful occasion for language learning to take place. Children will be watching her write down their stories and if the teacher engages children in informal discussion, quietly commenting on what she is doing as she is doing it, children will begin to pick up some of the basic language concepts. The teacher can begin to ask children what she should do now; how she does something – like the shape of a letter. She could ask children if they could do some of the work themselves – name letters, indicate capitals, etc.

What should a teacher draw attention to?

Importantly – that everything a child says can be written down and anyone else can read what has been written down and understand what the child has said. Specifically, everything can be written down using the letters of the alphabet. These letters are the same for everyone. These letters have

names; they have sounds; they are formed in a certain way. Letters make up words and words have sounds and these sounds may be spoken as syllables. Words have meanings but meaning comes from sentences. Certain names have capitals and sentences begin with a capital and end with a period.

"There, I've written your sentence. I began with? – that's right, a capital letter. Now what do I put at the end of a sentence? A period. Do you think you could put in the period for me? Now, let's read what your story says and then you can read it to your group. I'm sure they would like to hear what you've written."

The teacher may draw attention as she writes to any language item that she feels is significant in either writing or reading.

In this way children begin to build up knowledge about language and acquire the relevant terminology. As the teacher begins to withdraw support at this initial level she can begin to introduce other items she feels important.

There is no need for the teacher to attempt definitions or to expect the child to give definitions. Knowing these definitions will not help a child to write better but understanding these basic concepts may help the child avoid error. If the child understands the concept he will demonstrate this by indicating the item if asked and by being aware of error.

He should not be asked to put this internalised knowledge into words.

B. HANDWRITING

If we talk with school children about writing many will say that they find it physically difficult to sustain over any length. We can appreciate this if we observe the awkward postures they adopt while writing. The actual writing is itself frequently unattractive. It can give little pleasure to the child and provokes criticism from the teacher – criticism which adds to the prohibitions and admonitions surrounding writing. Some children find it difficult to write with any ease or speed and this can merely add to the tension that already exists between the child's ideas and the frustrating physical effort of recording them.

Despite this, many schools do not appear to have a systematic way of teaching handwriting although, as in anything else in writing, the mastery of a sub-skill must free more resources for more significant areas. Perhaps we introduce writing too early and do not allow for individual variation.

The examination of a number of commonly used methods of teaching writing suggests the following:

1. the now traditional 'pre-writing patterns' that children are taught are ineffective both for children who are ready to write and for those who are not. Children with sufficient motor control to be able to begin the formation of letters are held back since the movements they are given to practise relate to the linked letters of mature writing rather than to the formation of the individual letters needed at the outset. In some cases the patterns are more difficult to form than individual letters. Children who do not have sufficient motor control to begin forming letters require a programme that will help them improve their ability to handle a line-making tool. Such writing patterns have no meaning for them apart from the reproduction of certain shapes which, to the child, are arbitrarily selected;

2. the activity is isolated; it relates to nothing other than the teaching of handwriting and develops no awareness that may be employed elsewhere;

3. the only motivation in such programmes appears to be the satisfaction that some children derive from the completion of a repetitive task;

4. the children do not naturally self-assess their work as they do, say, in drawing.

A further difficulty arises when children are asked to copy words from blackboards before they have learnt to make each letter by the correct sequence of strokes. Bad habits are developed, e.g. the slow production of letters made from the base-line up – a habit that cannot be corrected without considerable time and effort being spent yet which has to be changed before the children will be able to write clearly and quickly.

What is required of a handwriting programme?

1. It should lead to the acquisition of fast and legible writing.

2. Initially, it should provide children with the means to develop fine control in the making of shapes.
3. Children should first learn to form letters in the correct sequence of stroke and then learn to order the letters of the alphabet.
4. Children should learn to make letters as early as possible but they should not copy words without supervision until they have learned to make a number of key letters correctly.
5. There should be an emphasis on a kinaesthetic approach to the learning of letter formation.
6. There should be a meaningful context for these activities.

Fine motor control does not need a programme. It can be taught within drawing activities. People jumping up or down may be represented by a continuous line with a number of sharp peaks in it; children running about in the gym can be represented by a line tracing maze patterns within a rectangle; children may trace their way home from school, etc. The activites not only encourage flowing continuous movements, they help the child appreciate that marks on paper can have a symbolic meaning. Other people will understand the child's marks once the situation has been defined.

Fine control may also come from the teacher setting up situations where the child has to introduce detail into drawing, e.g. details of features or clothes; the drawing of articles in a shopping bag; a cascade of falling bricks, etc.

These drawings, which could form part of a pre-writing programme, not only encourage fine control – they provide that explicitness in the child's representation of experience that we have argued for above.

Teachers should question the desirability of young children using thick unwieldy wax crayons or magic markers to make their first letters or drawings. They are not only awkward to hold, they encourage the child to develop a way of gripping the drawing medium that is inappropriate to the use of pen or pencil. After children have some skill in controlling line and making precise shapes they should move immediately on to the making of letters. The formation of letters is a movement skill and is learned in the same way that children learn to hit a ball with a bat – by practising the movements frequently. The correct movements must be practised with sufficient speed for the child to be aware of the 'feel' of each movement. A letter cannot be considered to have been learned until the child can make the letter by a correct sequence of strokes, instinctively and without having to think where to begin and end.

Slow copying can be delayed until children acquire the means to write key letters and there should be emphasis on the kinaesthetic approach. In the early stages recently developed systems based on children acquiring the movement needed for each sequence of letters have proved effective. One possibility is for children to draw quickly over acetate-covered letters and then write the letters. The effectiveness of this approach depends on the children acquiring the 'feel' of how to form each letter. Children are encouraged to make the movements for each letter sufficiently fast for them to acquire the habit of making the correct sequence of strokes.

C. WRITING AREAS

It is quite common for teachers to devote special areas to reading and to provide a variety of reading material within the classroom but this is less commonly done for writing. When the child is moving away from dictating to the teacher or copying captions he may require various materials to support his individual writing. While it would be attractive to provide a pleasant and quiet place for writing, this may not be practical. What the teacher may wish to provide is a resource area for writing.

This area should have a wide variety of books which children may read for pleasure and information and which supply ideas and models for writing. A cassette tape-recorder is useful for recording the children's own stories and for listening to poetry or prose. A viewer for looking at slides is useful as pictures are powerful sources of ideas. If the teacher wishes, the area may contain a 'post-office' where children and teacher may leave messages for one another. There should certainly be a message board and the possibility of displaying writing. The teacher will probably wish the children to produce books on various topics and there should be a supply of coloured paper, art materials and material suitable for binding or covering books.

What resource material could be provided?

Children's own word books and word boxes not only help the child by giving him assistance with words which cause him difficulty, they help the teacher diagnose weakness by alerting her to letter clusters or sounds which the child has difficulty in spelling.

The resource area might contain remedial material to which the child could be directed by the teacher. This should be programmed and self-correcting wherever possible. Material like alphabets with arrows

showing how letters are formed, programmed spelling material, commercial or school-produced programmes that teach punctuation or how to deal with common errors. School staffs might identify such errors in writing and ensure that individualised material is available to which children may be directed when, and only when, required.

An important part of any language programme must be to encourage children's interest in words and their delight in their use. A writing resource area should contain dictionaries made by children themselves, picture dictionaries for young children and children's dictionaries. The resource area is the place where children communicate words that they have found that amuse or interest them – words which children see around them in the street, in adverts, on television, in papers or magazines; words which have an amusing sound or a pleasant or ugly sound; words which the children make up to describe people or objects or states of mind; words with a curious history; their own definitions of words; illustrations for ambiguous words like 'a watch-dog'; murals or collages illustrating words – children can illustrate simple ideas like 'beauty' or 'ugliness' and then justify their choice of illustration; collages can be made up, particularly by younger children, using 'real' words from newspapers, magazines, packets, labels; children can make their own collections of words arising from classroom activities or their own interests; share definitions, likes or dislikes in words, set posers.

There can be little language growth if there is no delight in words. Obviously books of all kinds – and not just children's books – will encourage this delight in words and in addition to picture books that are chosen for their beauty, vividness, humour, evocative quality, associations, mystery, stimulation, children and teacher should provide objects, humdrum or exotic, which encourage exploration through words.

The best writing usually comes from within a context that calls various forms of writing into being and which provides a purpose for writing but hopefully children will wish to write for the sake of writing and it may be that some may need starting points. There is no reason why children who have time to spare should not be encouraged to turn to the writing area as now they may turn to the reading corner.

Pictures are extremely useful. Their discussion within a group of children may provide ideas for writing and may encourage children to consider sensory or emotional responses. Pictures from magazines and newspapers are useful but post-cards from art galleries, museums or art shops are particularly useful in that they may have an impact or a teasing and mysterious quality not always found in photographs. Slides of all kinds are equally valuable and a slide viewer should be provided in the writing area. The teacher may wish to provide cards to accompany pictures and which may be used by children who can read. These cards should contain suggestions for discussion or for writing. The suggestions should not refer to factual aspects of the pictures but should refer to possible contexts, explanations, responses, associations, outcomes.

Pictures may be put together in sets – sets of people, of places, of buildings, of objects. A child may deal himself a 'hand' of pictures and try to write a story round them; children may set problem situations for other children to write about, games may be played – a child having to incorporate his picture group in the story. Some children may still need support in constructing a story and sequences of pictures are helpful here. For children who have difficulty in making up stories, familiar comic-strip heroes or heroes and heroines from familiar T.V. programmes may provide starting points. Comic-strip sequences with dialogue blacked-out may be an introduction to the writing of plays. The teacher may wish to provide some children with ideas for openings and endings with some details about possible characters or plots. Headlines from newspapers are good starting points for children who need help.

The writing area should be that place in the classroom where a class's interest and delight in the written word is given visible expression. Where children's work is displayed, it should be displayed to its best advantage – well-mounted, well-illustrated and typed if possible. Errors in spelling should be corrected as they tend to draw critical attention. Displays should change regularly and should reflect the changing life of a classroom and the children's involvement in and curiosity about the changing world outside. The attractive displaying of children's work in the classroom, in corridor or hall, in books circulating through a school and into the world outside school helps give the child some pride in his writing, helps create some purpose and motivation in writing. A curling page torn from a jotter and impaled on a drawing pin does not have the same effect.

11. THINGS TO DO IN WRITING.

A. CREATING A CONTEXT

Meaningful writing cannot take place in a vacuum. Nor can it be considered in isolation from the whole school situation. It will only occur in any quantity where there are rich and lively contexts for learning. What contexts are we talking about?

The Teacher and the Child

Much of what a child will want to speak and write about will lie outside of the school – his hopes and fears; his likes and dislikes, his relationship with adults and other children; his games and imaginings; his traditions and superstitions; his 'map' of the area around his school and home – so different from that of any adult – and so on. It may be possible to teach a child maths without recognition and understanding of this other world. It is certainly not possible to teach the craft of writing in this way. If we do not respect, value, and attempt to sensitively enter into what the child brings to school he will not share it with us. He will leave his childhood on the doorstep and our teaching and his learning will be the poorer for that. We see this shared reality as an essential element in the development of a child's language ability.

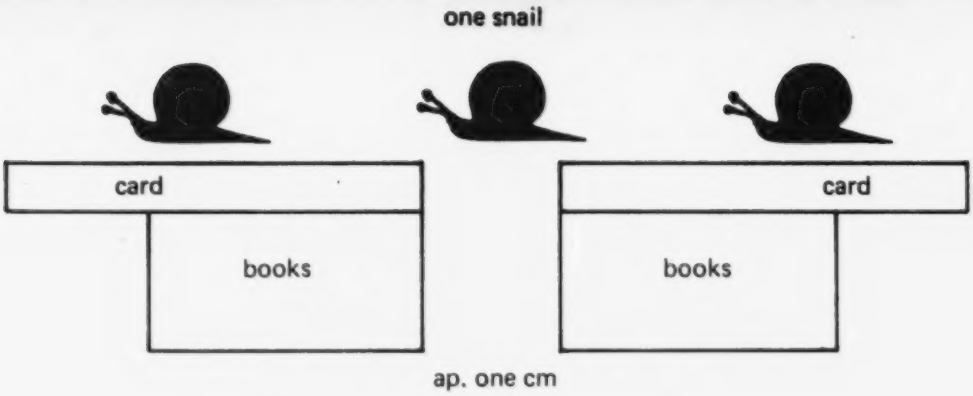
The School Environment

It is suggested many times in this paper that children will not learn to write from text books. The child opens the book. He does the exercise. He closes the book. He has come from nowhere and gone nowhere. (The structure of such books is always more apparent than real.) He has gained next to nothing and his work has given nothing to the classroom community.

Consider instead a classroom rich in opportunities for exploration, wondering, questioning, observation. There will be animals and plants to look at and look after. There will be countless starting points for learning – stones, shells, photographs, maps, feathers, old clocks, mirrors, sections of trees, springs, wheels, a piece of an old wasps' nest ... etc., etc. There will be apparatus for measuring, weighing, magnifying, timing. The immediate outside environment will have been developed to provide mini-habitats attracting birds and insects and to offer opportunities for imaginative play. Children will often be working outside. Inside, the classroom will look more like a workshop than a traditional classroom. Children will be encouraged to acquire the skills necessary to pursue independent lines of enquiry. There will be areas equipped to allow children to bake and cook, paint and draw, work with clay, write and tape, read and research, make music. Such classrooms are not uncommon, though there are surprisingly fewer of them at the upper end of the primary school than at the lower end. They provide almost limitless opportunities for a wide range of meaningful writing activity. The problem here may well be coping with the flow rather than eliciting it.

30. *This piece of wood is dented, with chipped pieces of a beige, silvery-coloured wood. It is smooth and rough at parts of it. When you knock it with your fist it sounds hollow. It comes from the bottom of a tree where all the branches join. Some of the wood at the joinings is a darker brown. It looks like an old dirty prehistoric creature from a million years ago. A bundle of old dirty torn up newspapers lying in the bin. It is bent and crooked and some of the wrinkles look like waves on a calm sea. One of the branches looks like a fallow deer's leg. It feels as if I am grasping a long, hard, bony arm. Small dimples and depressions. It smells like a musty old house left for weeks. A crossbow. Small cut parts like scars on a face. It was found washed up on stones. Driftwood.*

31. *The slime is to help the snail move more easily. It helps it to slide along. Snails can go over obstacles because in my last experiment the snail went right over the orange peel. We put two pieces of card one cm apart and put a snail on the other card for bait. It crossed the gap by putting its feelers over the gap and touching the other side. Next we made a 1½ cm gap. It crossed it in compleatly different way. It found that it could not touch the other side so it went down the same side then turned its self round then climbed up the other side. We then made a gap of 2 cm. It crossed in the same way as it crossed when the gap was 1½ cm. We measured the length from the bottom of the tentecils to the top of the tentecils. It measured aprox 1 cm. We came to a conclusion that a snail can only cross a distance that is of shorter distance or the same distance apart as the length of its tentecils in the way demonstrated below.*



32. *The pigs had wiry coarse hair and their skin was pinky red. The pigs are bigger than cows which is surprising. I thought cows would be longer but they're not. Pigs will eat everything except zips. They like buttons but they sometimes spit them out. I don't like pigs because they're so big and they eat everything. If you put your hand in the pen there would be no hand when you brought it out again.*

    In five to six years a pig will have given 200 piglets. When the piglets are born they can walk a few seconds after the birth. They scramble over to the teats and start drinking milk. After that they go into the infra-red light for warmth. The pigs were strapped into cubicles because if they walk around they lose weight using energy and want to eat more food. So they get strapped in to save food.

Created Contexts

However rich the classroom environment and however resonant with opportunities for writing there will be many occasions when the teacher will wish to create a particular context for a particular purpose.

In one school at one time:

– a P2 teacher who had been looking at 'Fabrics' with her pupils from a mainly scientific viewpoint set up a tailor's shop in a corner of the area. With the children she began to talk about what kind of person the tailor might be and what kind of life he might live. Together they created and physically made a character to inhabit the shop. He promptly 'came to life' and a whole series of incidents, suggested by the children, befell him. He had a birthday, was ill, went to hospital, convalesced, was burgled, sold his shop, went on holiday and eventually retired to the country. All these happenings elicited, and indeed often required, a great deal of writing.

– a P4 teacher working on the theme of 'Bridges' with her class was concerned about the lack of opportunities for language work the theme was providing. She divided her class in two and each half, independent of the other, made a picture of an imagined country. These were displayed divided by a river. As it happened the two countries differed greatly – one rural and one urban. The children then went on to 'flesh out' their creation by inventing and describing methods of government, national costumes, money systems, musical instruments, plant life, dialects, etc., etc. They became natives of their country and described their daily lives. They also wrote highly prejudiced accounts of life in the other country. Finally a marriage ceremony and the building of a bridge symbolically united the two countries.

– a P6 teacher had chosen 'the Home Front in the last world war' as his theme for the term. As part of their early work the pupils produced a long frieze of a street at that time. From the remark, 'Yes, it's a fine picture but who lives in number 35?' they went on to people the houses with families, each character being realised in some detail. To do this and to describe the interior of the houses and the life of the inhabitants demanded considerable research – research which was focussed and purposeful compared with the more common mining of reference books for unrelated and often unassimilated pieces of information. The teacher gave each house a 'letterbox', allowing him to feed in requests for census returns; a local newspaper; evacuation orders and so on. The families also could and did communicate with each other. Events such as an unexploded bomb outside number 43; the evacuation of all children; the return of a soldier from the front etc. were introduced and required responses from the whole community. Again, opportunities for purposeful writing, talking and improvisation proliferated.

It does no justice to any of these pieces of work to describe them so briefly. They do, however, share certain fundamental characteristics which are worth noting.

1. All of them led to writing notable for its quantity, variety and quality. A substantial amount of this writing was voluntary.

2. At the end of the work the children had a strikingly greater understanding of the purposes and demands of different kinds of writing.

3. There was nothing half-hearted about the creation of these contexts. They were not one-off situations set up by the teacher and allowed to wither. On the contrary, the children were active collaborators throughout, often initiating surprising changes in the direction of development.

4. The fictions created were consistently rooted in the reality of the child's own experience and perceptions. This contrasts strongly with the 'Day in the life of a Viking warrior' approach.

5. The opportunities for writing were accompanied by, and indeed often derived from, opportunities for work in other areas of the curriculum.

The Curricular Context

It should be clear from what we have said that writing cannot be looked at as separate from the rest of the curriculum. Very many writing possibilities will come from environmental studies and science work. This writing will range from describing and reporting to poetry, and indeed these elements may well be intermixed in the one piece. Writing will emerge from and contribute to all areas of the expressive arts. For example children will write pieces in response to another child's painting or wish to illustrate another child's story. They may write words to tunes they have composed or make music for poems they have written. The less divisive the curriculum is and the greater the inter-relationship between different aspects, the more opportunities for writing will naturally occur.

B. STARTING POINTS WITHIN THAT CONTEXT

Within even the richest of contexts a teacher may have to help a child identify those things about which he may write. This is not something that all children can do. We started this paper with examples of the simple naming of events that passed for the child's recalling of significant events; we saw the adverse effects of the typical news item. We have to accept that many well-used writing topics are too difficult for many children. Think what most children make of topics like 'A Day at the Seaside'. Many children simply do not have the ability to select, to shape, to organise, to tease out the significant from the trivial. We probably will be given an account of the whole day starting with getting up and proceeding inexorably through to 'then we had tea and went home' or we may be given a sterile list of money spent and things consumed. Shakespeare may have held a mirror up to nature but children should be encouraged to hold a magnifying glass up to it. What children have to be helped to do is to look closely at more tightly-defined events and to report honestly on them. It should not be 'A Day at the Seaside' but the sensation of sun and sea and sand, the exploration of rock and pool, that we should be asking for.

(i) Children's Preoccupations

Even the most rich context may not allow the child to express through writing those things that preoccupy or obsess him, those things that interest, puzzle, bore, surprise, amuse, delight him. We can hardly expect a child to leap exultantly from bed because today he is starting 'Transport through the Ages' but we can expect him to be fascinated by aspects of his own life and that image of himself he sees reflected in the eyes of others. It would be an interesting exercise for the staff of a school to sit down and make a list of all those topics that might really interest and involve children and, having made that list sit down again and discuss how they might make the topics even more particular and finely focussed. Children have to feel that the teacher is interested in what might appear to be the trivia of their daily lives – and remember that length is not important when a child writes. All that he wishes to say may be caught in a few lines.

Here are a few ideas to consider.

Today, since you got up, has anything annoyed, excited or amused you?

Describe a picture seen on T.V., the cinema or in a newspaper during the last few days that has disturbed you. Can you explain why?

Is there anything that you just couldn't do?

During the last week have you discovered anything about yourself that you didn't really know before?

What things that you have to do make you feel childish?
What things that you do make you feel grown up?
What do boys/girls seem to do that girls/boys don't?

Sometimes you are very fond of your mother and father but occasionally you are not very friendly. Write about this.

Are you always pleased with Christmas presents?

These kinds of starting points may be multiplied almost endlessly; they draw on things that matter to many children and hopefully will provide a reasonable first draft on which teachers may work, and remember it is better to start with the recall of how our hands feel after making snowballs than with "Winter".

(ii) Starting points from reading

The child may find starting points in short extracts from poetry and prose and the teacher may choose to make up cards on which are printed extracts of this kind. The child can look through these cards and hopefully find something that interests him enough to write about it.

In her blue duffle coat my daughter walks
By my side, her hand in mine, chattering
About all she sees, her music lessons, talks
Innocently with a bright serious face.

* * * *

Against the evening sky the trees are black
Iron themselves against the iron rails;
The hurrying crowds seek cinema or homes
A cosy hour where warmth will mock the wind.

* * * *

And that part grew up with me; that small world widened as I learned its secrets and boundaries, as I discovered new refuges and ambushes in its woods and jungles; hidden homes and lairs for cowboys and Indians, and the tall, terrible half-people who rode on nightmares through my dreams.

* * * *

It was long past his bedtime, but he made no move, though he had promised faithfully to be in bed by nine o'clock. He stayed at the window watching the corner of the street. He was looking for his parents and he knew from past experience that he could be in bed and pretending to be asleep, from the time they turned the corner till their key went in the lock. Of course, he wouldn't have time to wash or clean his teeth, but Tommy's plans about washing – like many things in his life, such as murdering his school teacher and getting a job as a dustman – were unfulfilled.

Even the words that lie around us may suggest interesting topics. Here a boy listed words that acted as barriers.

Ball games prohibited; Keep Out; Keep off the Grass; No Entry; Private; No Parking; Members Only; Whites Only; No Cycling; Beware of the Dog; Beware of the Bull; X Film; No Exit; Passport Control; Customs; No Pets; Police Notice; Diversion; No Ball Games; Police – Stop; Stick no Bills; No Fishing; No Children; Closing Down Sale.

Behind these are anecdotes waiting to be explored.

33. *It always says KEEP OFF THE GRASS or other rude things.*
I don't think that that is very nice.
TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED
NO CYCLING.
The one I hate most is the old BEWARE OF THE DOG.
I can't walk along a full street without seeing at least three of these.
My next door neighbour has a BEWARE OF THE DOG sign
And all she has is a poodle.

(iii) Helping Children to Find a Way In

Even with topics provided by the context a child may need help in getting started. Any approach that encourages the child to look more closely at particular experience is usually helpful. For example, contrast may help, or the movement from silence to noise, space to confinement, from dark to light, happiness to unhappiness, pride to shame, confidence to fear.

Or words themselves may provide the starting point. This helps to keep children away from their inevitable concentration on a story line.

contrasts

34. *The quiet place that I like best is up in my room looking out of the window. I just kneel on my bed and close my eyes. All you hear is the people out in the street screaming and shouting. I always go up to my room if I'm in a fight with my wee sister and I make her cry. I feel sorry for her.*

35. *The world is terrible in this cage. It's like being in prison. I can't fly around. All I do is eat seed, seed, seed until it's coming out of my ears. How I envy those scruffy sparrows in the garden. They may be chased by the cat next door but at least they have freedom. It's boring and lonely here and no space to stretch my wings.*

36. *The street was dark When we walked to school*
The closes were dark and scarey
The houses stood dark and quiet,
The curtain were drawn at the windows.
Our way was lit by faint street lights
The silence was broken by our chatter.
Suddenly the sky seemed strange,
A bright red glow appeared.
A brilliant red sun rose above the rooftops.

words

37. *Fireworks like shooting stars, twisting, turning, twirling everywhere. Road signs that lead nowhere, daggers in the night. Hot-shot zooming dodgedly spiralling past spaghetti motor-ways. Shooting stars cross the milky way like hikers on the rampage.*

38. *Whirling, twirling, spinning. Whining motors slitting the air. Lights flashing, dials registering, rudders jabbed. Wires vibrating, hovering still, speeding now, gently touching down and all is still.*

39. *The glubleby baby was in its pram outside the gluttonous supermarket. It was very annoyed indeed. It threw everything everywhere. It looked as if its calicosle mother was going to get a grunkle. Oh that baby does look gloclebang. It looks as if it's taken a pollynut of squmshle. His bucklechuck was all collyputt with icolastipain.*

40. *High, swerving, cold, salty, noisy, grey, blue, green, quick, jumpy, deep, calming, low quiet, jumping like a horse, quick as a bullet, cold as an iceberg, quiet as a mouse.*

fine focus

41. *Delicious creamy gorgeous scrumptious eatable jelly your mouth waters crisps soft tasty double supersonic Fanny Craddock cold giant size brilliant trifle.*

42. *When I get angry I feel like a chip pan with sizzling fat in it. My hands are feeling like strangling someone and my feet are like very hot sausages and then I go into my bedroom and slam the door.*

43. *My ears feel like a very small cave with a hole which only a very small creature could enter. I feel my eyes and the skin that covers my eyes feels like a balloon before it is blown up. My eyelashes feel like small strands of grass. My eyebrows feel like moss. When I touch them they are very smooth. My nose feels like a steep hill with just two entrances which have no other way out. My cheeks are smooth but when I put pressure on them they are like bulging balloons. My teeth are like a row of smooth stones. My lips are like a small hill with a band on the top of it. My hair is like a large hill of grass.*

44. **Peacock Feather**

Staring eye looking close
both sides shimmering loose
Slim all the way up
Look close – your eyes moving upwards
until you come to the top
and pop
right in front of you
the staring
the beautiful
the delicate eye.

45. *It is a calm night. The village sleeps while the flushing sea goes on. The seagulls have swiftly vanished from the fish-fed quay. Up the cobble streets the houses calmly snore. At the side of the road there are seasprayed carts with a common fishy smell. Crash! a boat hits the slimy barnacled pier like a smudged detonation.*

46. **Grandad**

Plodding along the road
Stumbling with his weary legs
Eyes set deep in his proud face
Peering over his little glasses.

Smiling happily when looked at
But hid behind the smile is sadness
He quarrels about money but he's happy
Then at night, no face put on
He's happier still in peace.

These are only a few examples of where we may find starting points. They lie all around us in the experience and imagination of children. The 'bigger' the topic the greater the danger of getting dishonest writing from children. If children appreciate that the teacher is interested in the minutiae of their daily lives and not just in 'Trapped by the Sea' or 'The Dark Wood' they may begin to give her that personal response that was missing in our earliest examples. Starting points are somewhat artificial but they may help children to enjoy writing and to find it a natural vehicle for the communication of things that matter to them or that catch their attention.

Hopefully, many children will in time dispense with the need to rely on them.

Although such starting points may lead to effective writing, sometimes they have the feel of an artificial, well-executed exercise. Here are some examples by children who have moved beyond the need for teacher-given starting points, who have found their own voices, and who have become writers.

47. *Bingo on a Monday;*
Tuesday night sewing up underwear;
Wednesday, Bingo Night;
Thursday, early bed;
Friday, O.A.P. day;
Saturday, a walk is fine;
Sunday, pulling the buttons of their shirts to put in the collecting plate.

LOOK AT OLD JESS they will say IT COULD HAPPEN ANY DAY

Stovies for the dinner
Tea without milk.

She wears them baggy bloomers,
She wears them big-heeled shoes,
Them skirts down past her knees.

Every now and then she'll turn to me and say in her old screechy voice:

YE DON'T KNOW HOW LUCKY YE ARE.

48. *Thoughts on going to Grantshouse*

The night before I go to Grantshouse I shall be busy getting my things out. I shall take the important things first – like wellies, pyjamas, slippers, jumpers, blouses, facecloth, toothbrush, toothpaste, trousers, socks, pants, shoes, coats. I will put them in my case and get my swimming things and towels. My Mum will probably help me. I will probably go to bed and get up early. I'll probably forget things. I'll have to go and see my Granny. I'll go for Jenny in the morning. I'll get up and get dressed. My Mum will check my things for me and I will have a big breakfast, say cheerio and say, 'See you next week.' I'll maybe cry. I'll go for Jenny and say cheerio to her sister. Maybe get my sisters up to school. I will get up to school and meet Moireen. Myself, I'll feel sad as I usually do.

We'll get in the bus. Maybe a holdup or somebody will forget something. Off we'll go, some sad. We'll get there and I think it will be quite exciting – thinking about home, getting settled in and looking around the beach. We'll probably go to bed at eight o'clock. I'm sleeping on the top bunk with Moireen – she's bottom. I can't really think what we'll have for breakfast. We'll get ready, make beds which I really like making. I don't like drying dishes. And we'll get washed and go down to the sea. We'll separate and go into groups. Some of us will go and explore the cave there is and some will go on the rocks. Some will find shells. I'm taking plastic bags and jars with me and I am going to try to like it.

I hope I like it because I'm not very good at leaving home. I'm a wee bit dreading leaving home because I don't know if I'll like it but I'll try to get on with the people. It's the first time I've left home for a camp.
We'll probably go and see what the village is like. I'll send postcards to all my family. I'll take money. I hope we have macaroni and cheese because it's my favourite. I suppose we'll have chips and I hope we have stovies. I hope we don't have cornflakes and we have puffa puffa rice instead.

I am excited and can't wait but it won't be long till we go.

49. *How I see myself*

I can't say that I haven't changed because I have. When I was in Mr. Smiths I was lazy simply because Mr Smith gave you your work and that was that. He would go over to people like Joan and talk to them all day, but Mrs. ... talks to every-body and helps you if your stuck on something.

I can't say that Mrs. ... doesn't like some more than others though. When I first came to 6A, the teacher must have thought I was lazy and couldn't care less because we didn't get on very well but I just couldn't understand her. I was also very stuck up but Mrs. ... soon brought me down a peg or two. Now I think I work fairly well, I don't sit around all day doing nothing. I sometimes feel let down on something like fractions. Whenever the teacher goes away I can't remember a thing. Now in maths I feel more confident and I think I am quite good. My first attempt of personal study was terible, but my second attempt was much better. I found a lot to do on it. My language is not good because it bores me, the same with spelling, punctuation and handwriting. I think I am quite good at art though. I like doing art and sewing. When it comes to friends I find it easier to keep friends than make them. for instance I get on well with Joan and Jean, but not Mary. I find it very difficult to communicate with boys because I get called names by one and the rest do the same. I think that friendship in 6A is split in two, the brainy girls and boys like James and people like Jane are neglected. (Most people make fun of Jane because of her breath.) I also find that people like Jane come to me with there problems or they cant do something. I honestly think I have changed for the best.

50. *Growing Up*

Smiling shyly like we do
behind our mothers' skirts;
grinning at the short remarks,
that are really silly and not very well observed.
But we love to listen to adults
telling us that we are big and sensible,

when we are only half that size
and bubbling over with mischief.
The pale faces and tightly clasped hands will never change.
And we are always imagined angels to every elder –
every wise and respectable adult
who has washed away infancy
with his last chocolate stains,
and proved it with clean boots and handkerchiefs.

They have now forgotten
that the stains of time
will ever remain.
Happiness is a guardian.
Love is a home.
Both of them are teachers
that set out the school books
in the midst of our dreams.

But they leave us to find out ourselves
when we have finally matured to an adult.
Parents watch on us happily,
until one day
they may tell us,
'Infancy is now just a sweet and happy memory,
as it should be, to you.'
With their own words in a tone
that we will always remember.

The winds of time will blow,
and we will turn our own ways.
Let it be a ceremony,
Practised by our ancestors.
Long before us.

51. *The trees are around you.*
The stars are above you
And you are trapped in between.

C. THE CLASSROOM COMMUNITY

We have spoken of creating environments but the most meaningful context is that created by the children themselves. A primary classroom is a community to which all, teacher and children alike, may contribute. Hopefully children will bring to that community things that are important to them. These 'things' may be memories or imaginings or they may be real objects but they all become things that can be talked about, drawn, discussed, written about. What the child brings and what is expressed through his writing and displayed for others to read can become points of reference; they can become growing points as other children add and develop and deepen the original experiences. Through this process, children grow in self-awareness and awareness of others. If we are lucky the environment of the classroom is being enriched by the children themselves. Teachers participate in this by their willingness to take seriously those things that children choose to tell them and by creating a physical environment which is itself rich. A child's growth cannot be measured by the accummulation of facts.

Teachers may say that this is all very well but they have other things to do and where do they find the time? Time can be found by simply accepting that working through page after page of a language text-book has little to do with language development. Time may be found by curtailing the saturation bombing of the classrooom with dozens of computation exercises.

Writing is central to what we do in school because it catches and holds both the outer and inner life of the child. It is a vehicle through which the child may use or communicate the products of his memory, perceptions, intelligence and imagination.

It must be given its place.

12. TEACHER RESPONSE.

A. DRAFTING AND EDITING

By drafting is meant the child's production of a series of versions of his writing; drafting is not the same as making a fair copy. In making the fair copy the emphasis is on getting rid of error and not on refining and extending the statement.

The most superficial consideration of how children are asked to write in school would indicate that demands are made of the child that would not be made of an adult. When an adult sits down to write he may scribble rough notes and then begin to work over them, selecting and rejecting, expanding and developing a sequence. When that is done he might produce a first draft and subsequent reading might lead to a number of drafts before the final editing session. In a school the child is expected to begin writing almost immediately the topic is given and the child who sits without writing anything may quite soon receive gentle pressure from the teacher. The use of rough jottings is not common and less common is the teacher's reading of rough notes and her discussing them with the child to help him isolate likely lines of development. The child is expected to progress from initial idea to final copy in something between thirty minutes to an hour. It is little wonder that many children write short and uninvolved pieces. There is no reason why a child's writing should consist of a series of quite isolated pieces. What is to be preferred – six versions of the same piece, the final one which gives the child satisfaction and from the production of which he learns skills and insights – or six different and possibly indifferent pieces? There is no reason why subsequent pieces of writing in a writing programme should not develop organically from previous pieces, the teacher seeking for growth points or suggesting alternative viewpoints. As the child works over areas of experience, deepening his awareness of them, and learning how to represent them to himself and to other people, then the child's writing must improve as he increases in awareness and in sensitivity and as he begins to understand what writing is for and how effects may be achieved. Considerable work is going on just now in the investigation of the various processes through which the writer goes in the production of an acceptable piece of writing. It is at least arguable that if teachers were to permit children some of the time for consideration and modification that an adult takes for granted then better work might ensue.

The child in the process of writing may go through various stages:

(i) Exploration

Many children will claim that they don't know what they should write about and all teachers are much aware of the long, and not very pregnant, silences, accompanied by much pen chewing. Discussion within the class or group may help a child to see possibilities in a topic but this can sometimes be counter-productive as the child may talk the subject out and lively discussion may be followed by disappointing writing or by writing which simply echoes the teacher's contribution. We have suggested various starting points but the child's ability to find material for writing is a product of the whole context of language work in a classroom. A child in a stimulating environment, with access to the models provided by wide reading, and with a teacher who shares his assumptions about what writing is for, will have less difficulty in settling down to putting his thoughts and experiences on paper. It will be easier to do this if the child feels motivated to write and if he has sufficient mastery of the sub-skills of writing to free himself for the exploration of the theme.

(ii) Focussing on the Subject

Much adult writing develops from rough notes and jottings and much thought. Many children are not encouraged to make random and tentative approaches to writing. The child's writing down of any ideas at all that occur to him when he contemplates a topic or a situation to be captured in writing may often throw out interesting starting points. The teacher's discussion of these rough jottings with a child helps him to see how they may lead to an effective piece of writing. The practice of asking a child to make an outline before he writes is not always helpful. Very often, what we write about emerges from the act of writing. Writing is frequently a kind of improvisation and the following of an outline, which is usually more concerned with structure, may inhibit that excited and involved act of composition which is one of the delights of writing.

(iii) The Process of Drafting

The piece of writing that a child hands over is not necessarily the finished product; it may simply represent where the child has got to at that moment. The child may have much more to say and may not be satisfied with what he has written. This is where the process of drafting may take place with the child modifying and refining what he has written. The teacher's role is a difficult

one. It is not a case of simply identifying error or telling the child what he might have written about. The teacher makes available to the child the response of a reader, and a sensitive and skilled reader at that. The teacher may talk about aspects of the writing that she might have liked more detail about; she may comment on her difficulty in understanding just what is going on; she may suggest sources for ideas; help the child consider alternative approaches; give technical help where the child is trying to communicate something through ways that lie outside his competence. What the teacher may do will vary but it doesn't really help the child to beome a competent writer if the teacher merely tidies up spelling and punctuation or gives the child ideas and words to incorporate without making these his own.

Remember that it is easy for drafting to become stereotyped and for the teacher to insist on several versions. What the child hands in may represent his final thoughts on the matter and should be accepted as such.

(iv) Some Techniques in Drafting

It is difficult, and probably undesirable, to prescribe what a teacher says when responding to a child's work but there are a number of points that a teacher may keep in mind.

It would appear that young children who are prepared to revise their work when they are drawing or building are more prepared to revise their written work than those who are not. This would suggest that when a teacher is talking with a young child about his drawing or constructions the kind of question that encourages the child to think about other possibilities will have an effect, not just on the work being discussed, but on the child's language competence.

We cannot expect beginning writers to revise their work in terms of the modification of individual words. Getting these words down is difficult enough. These children will tend to modify their original statement in terms of new facts or new feelings. The kind of feed-back that would seem most useful at this stage is that which encourages explicitness or an awareness of what the viewer or the reader would wish to know.

We have to remember that children will find it difficult to be explicit about physical actions or emotional responses because adults tend not to talk in explicit terms about such things. Feed-back which encourages the young child to mimic physical actions or to act out responses and then the placing of these in specific contexts is helpful in encouraging young children to return to their writing and to communicate their awarenesses more explicitly.

Writing which is based on personal recall is easier to revise because the teacher may recall similar experience of his own or of other children or turn to literature to provide alternative possibilities to sharpen the child's own insights. Obviously children writing about topics they have chosen for themselves usually find it easier to suggest alternatives or to incorporate more material. Stories, especially when the emphasis is simply on the retelling of events in a chronological sequence, are more resistant to revision because once the child finishes the story it seems 'fixed' and he may have no interest in modifying it. Discussion based on character, motives, or setting, seems more productive than the discussion of the plot.

When a child is searching for meaning in an experience or is seeking a solution to a problem, he is involved in a very personal kind of writing and is not concerned with communication. This being so, jottings, single words, phrases, may be enough to hold his insights and let him work on them. However, many children are reluctant to produce writing that is not grammatically complete. They will find it difficult to make notes that keep up with the flow of their perceptions because they will write in fully articulated sentences. It may be necessary within drafting procedures to encourage, even train, children to write impressions, etc. in the form of single words or phrases. When the child has worked out what he wants to say is the time to put his conclusions into a form that is meaningful to others and/or satisfying to himself. **It is important to see much of the writing produced by the child, not as complete in itself, but as a step towards something else.**

Children who are finding it difficult to start or develop a piece of writing may be helped by the teacher asking them to produce a number of possible openings. In discussion the teacher should encourage the child to select openings that start close to the significant events in the story or recollection. Hopefully this encourages the child to focus in on the events and will begin to recall to his awareness specific items which may be incorporated in his writing. With children who are finding it difficult to select something to write about, this could be used as a standard technique to get them started — the production of several openings providing material for discussion with the teacher or other children in the writing group.

Although there are many occasions when we would wish the child to write from within an experience we would also hope to help him to move away from an egocentric stance. There are a number of linguistic clues to the degree of abstraction in a child's writing. Where the child uses a high percentage of 'I' or 'we', the teacher may encourage him to think of the role played by other people in the story, how they reacted, the relationship between them and the story-teller. Similarly a limited number of references to physical location should lead the teacher to encourage

the child to think about 'placing' the action in a context that is understandable to the reader. A preponderance of relationships based on time sequence might mean that the teacher has to ask the child to consider how the events being described affected other subsequent events or why people behaved as they did.

Effective writing only takes place once the various sub-skills of writing – hand-writing, spelling, punctuation, etc. – can be carried on with the minimal conscious attention. When we write we have to pay attention to a large number of sub-skills and the young or less competent writer finds it difficult to give attention to all of them in the way that a more mature writer would. Of course, there will be children who write quite fluently but quite regardless of formal conventions. If a child is concerned simply with getting words down on paper, or being neat, or spelling correctly, then the content of the writing will suffer. This simply underlines the importance of developing competence in these sub-skills so that they may be deployed quite automatically. The relevance of this to drafting procedure is that we should do more than merely involve the child in a discussion of formal error when we talk with him about his writing. The relevant sub-skills should be taught, as suggested elsewhere in this document, away from the actual act of writing. The teacher's main role in drafting techniques has to do with the development of content – helping the child to find things of significance and interest in his own experience, communicating effectively with others, producing work that he finds satisfying.

(v) **Editing**

Many children make mistakes that they can identify and remedy for themselves. Unfortunately they may be reluctant to read their work or may read swiftly and carelessly, concentrating on the story line. Children should be encouraged to proof-read carefully and to exchange work with other members of the group for this purpose. The more critical appraisal a child's work gets the better – and the first criticism should come from himself. It is after this that the writing should be given its final form.

The teacher has to help the child arrive at a statement that is satisfying to him. In discussion during the various drafting stages the teacher will help the child re-shape or clarify his statement. To do this the child must be given the 'tools' of writing but without resorting to mechanical or repetitive exercises. If we put these stages together we get a sequence like this:

The teacher is saying: "Look, this is the kind of thing I expect you to do when you write. For example, if I ask you to write about something you've done remember I wasn't there and I'm interested in what you thought about it, so don't just give me a superficial statement about what happened. Now, here are various ways you might consider of looking at your experience or giving your imagination freedom and here are various ways of organising what you might have to say. If you're having difficulty finding things to say here's material that may start you off or here's a way of getting down all that you are aware of in this situation. And now that you've got it written here's a way of reading your work that will help you see errors or less effective parts in it and here are things you can do to get rid of them."

Here is a child moving through several versions in her writing. A class is writing about the school neighbourhood. After a class discussion they write down anything they have noticed about a group of old buildings. These four stages are the work of one pupil.

52. A *old tenements; ramshackle old buildings with bricks falling out the walls; slates falling off the roofs; squatters; down and outs looking for shelter for the night; graffiti (word given by teacher); writing on the walls; vandals writing their names; slums; vandals smashing windows and throwing bottles in closes; shops closed down because of vandals; boys and girls standing at a corner and bossing everybody about; smashing street lights and cutting telephone wires; robbing old meters in the alleys; smashing telephone boxes and taking money from them; litter; litter all over the place and bins falling; all the rubbish falling out into the street.*

The child considers the jottings, selects some, puts them into an order and tries a first draft.

52. B *You can see them everywhere, old buildings. Tenements, ramshackle buildings, falling down from old age. Bricks falling with a thud from walls and on to the roads and slates falling off the roofs. Squatters looking for closes or old, empty buildings. Young people writing graffiti on the walls with paint sprays. Vandals smashing shop windows and street lights. Thieves robbing old men and women in the streets. Hooligans tumbling the bins to increase the litter. Litter can cause disease and germs to spread through the town.*

The child was quite happy with this draft. In talking with her the teacher asks her to look at the way in which her account was built up. Sentences are short and repetitive. The teacher suggests it is rather like a list. He comments on the public health note in the final sentence.

The teacher takes up an idea from another child's writing and suggests to the class that a useful tool to describe these buildings would be to use metaphorical language. The correspondence between old buildings at the end of their lives and old people was put to the class. Some of the comparisons that occurred to them were:

52. C *Buildings – tired old men; empty windows – blind eyes or broken teeth; old curtains or torn wall-paper – rags; litter – wreckage washed up on the shore; graffiti – animal marks.*

The class had been looking at a great deal of poetry by contemporary West of Scotland authors and had attempted to imitate some of the forms or to write prose poems. The teacher suggested that this scene might be a good one for poetry. The mood of the poem was discussed with the class and blackboard work revised the construction of prose poems.

This is the final version produced by the girl.

52. D *The old building stands like a tired old man.*
The blind eyes of windows look down on garbage-littered streets.
Forgotten curtains flutter like rags in the cold wind.
Bricks fall from crumbling walls;
Slates fall from broken roofs.
The building is like a jungle in which gangs wait for the old and weak,
Leaving their animal marks on the walls.
"Tyre rules. O.K."
The wreckage of tin cans, dirty papers and broken furniture
Spreads into neighbouring streets,
Carrying its germs with it.

This is not a particularly elaborate version of drafting. Some children will go through many more drafts with precise modifications to individual words, particularly when writing poetry. However, it is reasonable to suggest that the final poem would not have been written had the child been given a topic and only one opportunity to write on it.

The accepting of drafting means that a teacher may have to change the way in which she organises writing. It is obvious that all children in the class will not be writing on the same topic at the same time – they may be on different topics or writing at different times. There seems to be no reason why some children should not embark on a lengthy piece of work, like writing a novel or their autobiography or keep on returning to the same theme over a number of weeks. The aim is to produce good writers; not to have all children in the class writing on the same theme. We do not have to accept the inadequate pieces of writing that we saw at the beginning of this paper and writing need not be in effect children producing inadequate first drafts. If we want excellence we have to work for it.

B. CORRECTION

It may be gathered from the arguments and examples above that it is our belief that the development of a child's skills in writing depends on a number of factors – the quality of the discussion between pupil and teacher, the wider language experience offered and the precision with which the teacher identifies weakness and finds specific remedies. The main remedial meeting point cannot be the child's script. The errors made by a child in writing are probably of long standing and it appears naive to believe that comments written in the margin are of much value. We may write "Wrong word" or "Meaning?" but how can a pupil translate these into understanding. To write in the correct version on the page is no guarantee that the pupil appreciates the underlying rule or principle. Such practices indicate that we have identified the error not that we have remedied it. We may end up with scripts so covered in admonition and correction that the child is left with a sense of failure in a situation where he may have little enough confidence or motivation. The failure to 'correct' every error in a child's writing may lead to accusations from parents or colleagues that we are doing nothing about incorrect forms. It is difficult to ignore such comments but we cannot let them force us into practices with which we do not agree.

Remedial work takes place away from the act of writing. The act of writing is one activity providing us with information as to where the child is now; the process of remedy and expansion will take place somewhere else.

We need information which allows us to compare the child with other children as well as providing diagnostic information. It is helpful to have some kind of grid or checklist on which we may quickly record strengths and weaknesses. This provides a pupil profile and a reasonable objective assessment. Class profiles indicate the need for class or group work.

It is helpful if the teacher has agreed with the class a series of symbols to indicate error and has established the procedure to be followed if the child is directed to programmed material. It may be that only certain errors will be indicated; the teacher may choose only to indicate those errors which he believes lie within the competence of the child or which indicate a child moving to the next stage in writing.

Evaluative comments are often more meaningful than number or category marks. The comments on the script should be as positive as possible but honest about weaknesses. "An exciting story but it's a pity the ending seems weak." The pupil is being assessed against himself in these comments. The teacher may choose to write a comment for the pupil on a separate piece of paper and return it to him. These comments may refer to possible development points within the story which the child may choose to consider during the next drafting stage.

By far the most effective method of correction is talking over the child's writing with him. There may be a tendency to concentrate on weaker pupils. Competent pupils can always develop and practical encouragement as well as praise is necessary for both brighter and weaker pupils.

If we want to improve writing we have to know what we want to do and how to do it. Decontextualised exercises will not improve writing; neither will a series of identifications of error which the child may not understand and to which he is not expected to make any purposeful response.

C. SEEKING CORRECTNESS

1. It is unfortunate that English grammar does not contain a definition of the sentence that is meaningful to young children. Any attempt to teach the sentence through definition would involve us in considerable labour. We have to depend on the development of a sentence sense. Should a child not develop this we have to work through a development of a relationship between sound and punctuation, through repetitive pattern work or through a discussion of actual sentences to establish the necessary elements in a sentence.

   If the infant teacher adopts the suggestion made above of talking children through what she is doing as she takes down their dictation then the child may develop an awareness of what a sentence is and how it is punctuated. This understanding will be reinforced if the child is involved in rich background reading. The examination of how writers build up sentences may be more profitable than the very common interpretation exercises which fragment the meaning in a passage.

   Such methods are purely for children who have difficulties and should not be seen as class activities. Where some children fail to grasp the completeness of a sentence, some teachers may choose to emphasise the period – not speaking or writing a sentence in a language teaching situation without indicating the period. Children may be encouraged to indicate where they think the period should fall as the teacher reads or talks. Children begin to associate the period with certain features such as pause or intonation. Taped material may be prepared in which the teacher reads simple sentences with marked emphasis on where the period falls. Children follow a text seeing the marks on paper that correspond to the sound features. They then follow a tape on an unmarked text and finally put in periods on a text without the tape. Such methods are for children who are having difficulty constructing sentences.

   A necessary component of training through sound is to train the child in careful proof reading, possibly associated with reading aloud. Many errors disappear at this stage.

   Synthetic exercises can develop the possibility of variety in sentence structures as do sentence games. The teacher of older children in need of help in constructing a range of sentences may prepare a series of cards each containing a sentence segment. These may be colour coded so that they are always put in the same order to provide a sentence. These sentences are frequently amusing and children like dealing out the cards and reading their resulting sentences. Often some of the sentences created may be used as a basis for writing. The expectation is that the child will develop an awareness of the "sound" of the English sentence. There is a range of commercial material using such cards, flip-over books or "roll a sentence" for young children.

   As in other areas of language, success in developing a sentence sense depends on the teacher taking every opportunity in talking and writing or reading to sensitise children to what is a sentence. The

use of a limited number of decontextualised sentences seems to be less effective.

2. Other forms of punctuation are easier to teach, especially where they are conventional punctuation that appear as a printer's convention, e.g. speech marks, or regular forms like the use of commas in a list. One effective way of teaching these is through the child's own discovery of the rules. This is an active procedure and as the child identifies the rules for himself there is more understanding and retention. It requires the preparation of material but once this has been prepared children can be directed to it and work through it on their own.

   The child is presented with 'real' material. This may be an extract containing examples of plural and possessive. The child, possibly within his group, is asked to supply a reason for the two different forms. It is important that only one problem is set at a time. In this case the possessive would be used only in the singular and with regular nouns. Once the child has formulated a rule he is given more extracts containing the relevant data to see if the rule stands up. If he is convinced that it does, he has to put the rule into operation. As the child can only make up a rule about things that he can identify and understand, there is a high degree of success in the method. Material of this kind should be part of the remedial material available in the writing area.

3. The teacher may wish to draw attention to how certain words are used. He could give definitions but it is better to look at such words in a context, e.g. a prose extract. Another effective technique is the use of cloze procedure where, say, every fifth or tenth word is omitted. Alternatively, the words may be omitted at random or the teacher may deliberately omit a class of words like adjective or conjunction. Children are asked to supply lists of the missing words. Children appear to like working at this and in the process of finding the words show a surprising awareness of how language operates, an awareness that could not have come through the use of conventional language exercises. Once the lists have been prepared, children should argue for their own list. It is this discussion which is important. Cloze procedure is in danger of becoming a stereotyped activity but it can make children think about how certain words are used.
   Another method of getting children to use their knowledge of words and to encourage them to pay attention to how words are used and how sentences structure is to ask them to discuss nonsense sentences. These are sentences in which the words used have no lexical meaning so the child cannot define certain words as being nouns because they are the names of things. It is important that grammar items are retained – verb endings and plurals in nouns. Function words like articles and prepositions are retained. Children will discuss these nonsense sentences with great pleasure and will show considerable awareness of how language operates. After all they have been listening to and looking at language for years and are able to talk about how language functions although they may not know the appropriate terminology. This method will quickly indicate that children may know a great deal of the language rules that are being needlessly taught in language exercises. They identify parts of speech by their endings, by their position in the sentence and by the function words associated with them; they know tenses, number and plurals. Such activities encourage children to make more explicit their own knowledge about language and to increase their conscious control over writing. Work with cloze procedure and nonsense sentences can be lively and profitable in that children are using and expanding the language knowledge that they have and not possibly receiving language knowledge that they already have.

4. One of the myths of creative approaches to language is that spelling doesn't matter. It is hard to see where that myth arose. Spelling does matter. We have suggested that unless the child has mastery over sub-skills in writing then other more important skills may be frustrated, and society expects that children will be able to meet the various writing conventions.

   It has to be said that spelling is not the most important thing in writing. Spelling errors are terribly obvious and adults who may not be able to make any other evaluation of a child's writing will identify spelling errors. The teacher's first concern is with what the child says; he will say it more effectively if he says it correctly and with a sense of style but it may be that at certain stages, e.g. when children are developing fluency in writing or with certain individuals who find writing particularly difficult, the teacher may be prepared to accept spelling error. This is a professional decision that the teacher makes. It should not be construed as the teacher ignoring written conventions.

   Again a child will learn to spell best within a classroom in which the teacher is interested in words and tries to arouse the pupils' interest – the names of cars and other products; street signs; words with histories; strange words; funny words; private words; sound words; the building up of words and the creation of new words.

   The children's reading provides opportunities to discuss such words and children should be encouraged to collect interesting words and to play word games. Children's spelling can be

improved but a school has to want to improve it and has to do more than the ritualistic ten words a night.

Diagnosis of actual error is important. There is little point in wasting a child's time on learning spelling words which are never misspelt. There are easily administered spelling tests available and certain spelling schemes include diagnostic material. The keeping of a pupil's spelling book into which words creating difficulty are put acts both as a dictionary to the child and a simple diagnostic record to the teacher. It is helpful if pupils are given spelling rules. English spelling is not as irregular as is sometimes supposed and if pupils have to make a conscious effort to spell words through the application of these rules it increases their efficiency in dealing with unfamiliar words. There are various procedures through which pupils are encouraged to move in learning to spell words, looking, sounding, tracing, recalling. If both teacher and pupil take an active part in learning to spell then improvement will occur. It is less likely to occur where the pupil simply moves through a spelling list, 'learning' several words each night, possibly unnecessarily, and forgetting them the next day.

D. GETTING RID OF DIFFICULTY: TWO EXAMPLES

Although we should seek to help a child understand that he has to take account of the possible reader when writing, this may not be enough. Explicitness in writing demands a battery of skills. Some of these skills may not develop spontaneously through the child's own writing. A close study of appropriate texts or teacher/pupil discussion may be necessary. We draw attention to two such skills which were simply taught.

(a) Of considerable importance to a child is the ability to pre-organise what he is going to put into his written communication. Here we have an example of a child who is having difficulty doing that. This is a boy, one of the least able group within the class. He is attempting to describe a dockside scene.

53. A *It was a dump and the wood was now good and ther was an old were house beside it and a gimley beside it.*
(It was a dump and the wood was no good and there was an old warehouse beside it and a chimney beside it.)

It would be difficult for the reader to visualise this scene. Why is the description ineffective? One reason is that many people, including adults, tend to organise recall as a time sequence. Such an organisation cannot deal with something static like a place, object or person. Another difficulty is that immature writers may describe as if the reader could actually see what is being described. This is a failure in the role-playing skill we talked about earlier. The writer cannot put himself in the place of his reader.

This boy did not have a repertoire of structures into which he could put what had to be communicated. The teacher talked with the group discussing the problem and seeking solutions; to describe the scene spatially working across the picture in an organised way; to start with the most dominating item; to start with a general description; to start with a general impression.

Following their discussion session the group returned to the same topic. Here is an example of a second attempt.

53. B *A town picture. It is a factory. It is big, ugly and very smelly. It has a big chimney sticking up. Then there is another factory. At the right hand side there is a block of flats which is quite new. At the left there is more houses. Beside the flats there is a warehouse. At the bottom there is a dock with wood in it.*

These were less-able children and the second attempt is not outstanding but there is an improvement. The reader can now visualise the scene and share in the writer's response to it. To bring about this change took one session of discussion. The children now had structures that enabled them to pre-organise their communication. They had a repertoire of structures and this lessened the difficulty. The reduction of difficulty in organising the message meant that more attention could be paid to the actual content and to the deployment of a previously passive vocabulary. The teacher's acceptance of an impressionistic style lessened the difficulty still further in the second piece.

(b) The difficulty that a writer has may also be lessened, the more naive and uninformed he sees the reader as being. The demands of the communication become clearer. One of the problems in getting a child to use language is that he knows the teacher knows. The whole activity may appear a little pointless and there may be anxiety on the child's part to match his product to the teacher's assumed knowledge.

A teacher taking over a class asked them to write about what they liked or dislike in their neighbourhood.

This writing is typical of most.

54. A *"I like the red ash. I go there with my friends. We play football. In winter we play with our sledges."*

As we have seen, this piece of writing is typical of many in the recall and communication of experience. It only makes sense for the reader if he already knows what the writer is writing about.

The teacher informed the class that he knew nothing about the neighbourhood and that he did not know what they were writing about. With each piece of writing he returned a slip of paper. This suggested ideas for a second draft. In the case of this boy the paper read: "I don't know anything about the red ash. What is it? Tell me more about what you do there, Has anything exciting or interesting happened to you there?"

The teacher also distributed a news-sheet. Eventually it became a way of creating an audience for the class's writing. The first issue declared:

> When I first spoke to you I asked you to tell me some of the things that you liked or didn't like about the place where you lived. You didn't think that I wouldn't know anything about this place and so you just said you didn't like the red ash or that you liked the tunnels and I didn't know what you were talking about. Then I asked you to tell me more about one of the things that you liked or didn't like.
>
> Some of you told me interesting things about what you do.

Then followed examples that might act as models.

There were no specific instructions in writing between the two pieces of writing. This is the second version of 'The Red Ash' –

54. B *The red ash is somewhere me and my pals always play at football. It has a big wall at one end and a big hill at the other. When it snows we all get bits of wood and slide down it right to the wall or we tie ropes on to it and pull it around. Last time I pulled it down the hill the rope snapped and I crashed into the wall and I hurt my head and it was in a big lump and all the snow at the wall hit me when I skimmed into it. Sometimes I go up to the high flats for my pals and we play at snowball fights. Sometimes I got my pal on the head and when it goes hard we use it as a big slide and my big brother split his arm open.*

Again the difference is quite obvious. All the teacher did was to share his assumptions about what he expected to read and made clearer the pupils' awareness of him as an audience. There was no specific teaching. What the teacher did was to make the task easier for the pupils in that they no longer had to invest the same intellectual effort in identifying what they were required to say with a consequent improvement in other areas like content and vocabulary range.

Sometimes the written exchange between teacher and child may be quite simple as in the following. Still it does present the teacher as an interested reader and not merely an examiner.

55. *My sister is a pig*
she grunts and she is lumpy when she sits down to eat her fat belly squeaks.

Teacher: I like this Jan.
Jan: Thank you.

The teachers in the examples above made writing easier for their pupils by removing uncertainty or difficulty from certain areas.

13. A FINAL WORD.

A FINAL WORD

We have to realise that in teaching language we are trapped in a Catch-22 situation. We cannot change language by changing language. It is the child behind the language we have to change. When we say that a piece of language is inadequate we do not necessarily mean that it is linguistically inadequate. What we do mean is that the insights, feelings and responses of the child do not illuminate or communicate the experience with which the child has been involved. In some ways it is a misnomer to talk of a 'language programme' although it may be convenient to do so and most people have some idea of what we mean. It is those aspects of the child that are managed, stored, used and shared through language that we have to work with. Because of the importance of language within the life of the individual, if we can increase the range of functions for which language can be used and if language can be used with greater precision and greater ease, then we must be producing some change in the way in which the child relates to himself and to the human and physical environment. Language helps realise the potential of the child; this is not easy and fifteen exercises on the use of the plural is not even within sighting distance of it.

If schools wish to develop writing skills what do they need to consider?

1. Writing has to be taught.

2. Many children will not write effectively without help because they do not share in the linguistic experience and expectations of their teachers; the tasks set them will be meaningless.

3. To teach writing effectively the teacher has to consider the following:
   (i) The language children bring to school and the differences between speech and writing.
   (ii) The language functions school requires and the response expected.
   (iii) The processes involved in the act of writing.
   (iv) The development of a sense of audience.
   (v) The criteria for the diagnosis and assessment of writing.
   (vi) The existence of a rudimentary sequential development in writing.
   (vii) The creation of contexts for writing.
   (viii) The nature of the response to make to a child to encourage him to move forward.
   (ix) The techniques and approaches which develop specific writing skills.
   These are:
   the provision of a writing resource area;
   the provision of good models with movement between talking, reading and writing;
   an initial writing programme including handwriting;
   a range of appropriate 'controlled' writing materials;
   the introduction of drafting and editing procedures;
   a positive attitude to the teaching of formal and stylistic skills.

To these must be added – an awareness of the needs and preoccupations of children at various stages.

14. CODA: CHILDREN WRITING.

Let us remind ourselves of some of the different voices we may hear from one class, or even from one pupil. Here are two short selections of pieces from two classes. In one we have descriptions of the class guinea pig and in the other a child's response to the sky.

56. *HONEY*

Slowly stumping along, her ears held high
as she stares at me with her beady eye;
her pregnant chest held low with strain.
My face heats up
as the warmth in her face I see
her feet stumpy
hid from sight.

57. *GUINEA PIG*

The guinea pig munches like a bunch of birds crushed up squawking for help. Its coat is like mud, all cakey and some white fur like a white star that has fallen from the sky. Her eyes are blue like the sea but brighter and lighter; her legs are like fat juicy worms bunched up; her jaws are like stumbled up rubbers. She squeaks like a girl who has been lost and is screaming for help.

58. *The guinea pig sits in the room and begs us to be quiet.*
And when we go home, to tea –

Oh what a relief!
I am glad all the time
when the night is long
so peaceful it all is
when I sleep in my cage.

In the morning it's raining hard.
The girls come in and
shake their hats
at my little cage.

When they go away
I'm soaking

59. *Eyes like saucers*
a pinkish nose
couple – coloured
and wrinkled toes.

Stumpy and plump
white ears in a lump
needle claws
she quakes and shivers.

60. *Golden honey colour. Auburn. Fat stubby face. Beady eyes. Eyes like pitch. She peers. She is very fat because she is pregnant. In her eyes mothercare is pressing on top of her greedy cheeky manner. Her shrill, squeaky ourtageous cry tells us when she is hungry or wanting petted. In her tufty, rosetted coat she looks very warm. Her stumpy button twitching nose gives her a cute look.*

61. ***HONEY — a guinea pig***

She sits proudly, her head up in the air.
Peering, staring.
With her golden sandy hair.
Each time you touch, it feels like saying,
'Away ya go and clap someone else.'
And she said,
'Look at all they skinny things there and me wi
ma big fur coat.'

62. *SKYSCAPE 1*

Shades of blue in the sky
light up the sleeping world.
The new wind shakes the flowers awake
and the kitchen lights are on.
A still picture.

63. *SKYSCAPE 2*

Dark forcefield keeps you inside.
When you look up in the sky
nothing is in view.
A dark sheet
of immensely thick
black paper.

64. *SKYSCAPE 3*

White and pink clouds
streak across the blue sky.
Windows catch the sunlight
and hold it in their warm panes of glass.
Shades of blue and pink and white
play around in the sky
like dangling ribbons
hanging from the sky.

65. *SKYSCAPE 4*

The sky is blue. The trees and the rest
of the world stand still. The world is
yet sleeping. A dim reception to any
stranger.

66. *SKYSCAPE 5*

Light dances on the wooly mixture
of puffed out gas.
Pink and white resting
on a blue surface.
The trees' branches shake
with the beat of the wind.
Dark clouds creep out on the blue sky.
A still sight.

APPENDIX

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES IN SELECTION

Stages	REPORT	STORY	RECORD
a	child simply names events; little selection or cohesion; mixture of banal/important;	child simply names the events he has imagined; rudimentary time sequence;	child simply names what he has observed;
b	'slice of life' – child simply takes reader through a chronological sequence listing all events that happened; importance given to 'punctuation marks of the day' – getting up, meals, bed-time, etc.;	events in chronological sequence; events frequently sensational or derivative;	child begins to be more specific about what he has observed, e.g. colour, shape, size, movement, characteristics, etc.;
c	child tries to convey quality of the experience – what he noticed and felt;	child injects into the imagined story more awareness of characters and setting;	child shows relationship between events – not just in time and space but how one event influences another;
d	child attempts to indicate the significance of the events for him – he uses hindsight; shows awareness of self and other people; moves in and out of the action as moves from participant role to author role;	characters not only more real but child describes human motives, responses; as much concerned with how people behave as with the sheer action;	the child seeks for an explanation as to why events take place – explanation may be result of observation but increasingly will involve deduction,
e	child identifies permanent elements in his experiences – how he tends to behave in certain circumstances; character traits; how people tend to behave; child is able to anticipate how he might behave in future and, as yet, unexperienced events.	if child is writing fantasy it is rooted in real life and shows an inner consistency; although the characters and events are purely fictitious, characters have the same consistency as real characters; if the child is writing imaginatively about other people he shows some understanding of how and why other people behave.	child attempts to extract some general principle from what he has observed; he may simply sum-up what he has noticed or he may attempt to formulate some theory to explain events;
f			child tries to apply these generalisations to a new situation – by trying to find practical applications or using theory to explain another set of events or to solve a problem.

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES IN EXPLICITNESS	DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES IN COHERENCE	DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES IN STRUCTURE
a. the child uses a literal vocabulary; considerable dependence on nouns; using linking verbs – to be/to have – a great deal; also common verbs like 'say', 'walk', etc.; very few adjectives or adverbs and limited use of works like 'very', 'too', 'much', etc.;	a. no very clear relationship between items; simple sentence predominates;	a. cluster of items with loose time connection between them;
	b. simple sentences giving way to co-ordination; items joined by loose chronology; considerable use of 'and then'; still confusion over time;	b. rudimentary time sequence;
b. increased use of adjectives and adverbs and use of adverbs to modify these;	c. co-ordination moving into subordination; the exact development of various subordinate clauses is difficult to chart but the following is a rough guide: **time clauses** (particularly to do with chronological sequence) appear early **place clauses** (particularly where) **noun clauses objective** ('he noticed that ...', 'he said that ...') some clauses showing **causal relationship** (if/because) child will still frequently use 'and' when should be using 'because'; if/because may be used almost as stock phrases without real understanding;	c. sequential narrative;
c. more words indicating responses, feelings; increased use of phrases;		d. selective narrative – child does not tell everything he has experienced; he only tells the most significant things; this may mean that the relationship between the items is not explicit; increased tendency to start near to significant event or to start in the middle of the action; some movement backwards and forwards in time as child increasingly comments on the events being communicated;
d. increased use of abstract nouns; use of metaphorical language;		
e. use of wide vocabulary appropriate to theme.	d. clauses which show **adversative function** (e.g. 'although' clauses) **clauses of manner** – 'as' **adjective clauses** are difficult to place; perhaps more widely used by children who are readers; statements suggesting possibility or tentativeness – built round verbs like 'might'/'should'; loss of redundancy, phrases and single words	e. child has developed a repertoire of structures to communicate a variety of events.

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Hand in Your Writing ' will be followed by the publication of other papers taking up various points raised in this paper and looking at these within the classroom context.

Papers planned include: **Contexts for Writing**
Responding to Children Writing

SCOLA is planning a programme of small-scale development work to take place in schools. This will investigate various aspects of the teaching of writing and will be of a practical nature.

Individual teachers, schools and teachers' groups interested in taking part in this work are invited to contact:—

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